United Nations A/S-25/PV.1

General Assembly

Twenty-fifth special session

Official Records

1st meeting
Wednesday, 6 June 2001, 9.05 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Opening of the session by the Chairman of the delegation of Finland

The Temporary President: I declare open the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The Temporary President: I now invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Tribute to the memory of the late Kings of the Kingdom of Nepal, His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev and His Majesty King Dipendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev

The Temporary President: The General Assembly will pay tribute to the memory of the late Kings of the Kingdom of Nepal, His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev and His Majesty King Dipendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I should like to convey our heartfelt condolences to the Government and the people of Nepal and to the bereaved family. I invite representatives to stand and observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of the late Kings.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silence.

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/S-25/4)

The Temporary President: Next, I should like, in keeping with the established practice, to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/S-25/4, which contains a letter addressed to the President of the General Assembly by the Secretary-General in which he informs the Assembly that 18 Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I should like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

> "A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years."

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

01-40004 (E)

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Credentials of representatives to the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly

(a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee

The Temporary President: Rule 28 of the rules of procedure provides that the General Assembly, at the beginning of each session, shall appoint, on the proposal of the President, a Credentials Committee consisting of nine members.

In accordance with precedents, and as recommended by the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly, the Credentials Committee of the twenty-fifth special session should have the same membership as that of the fifty-fifth regular session of the Assembly, namely, the Bahamas, China, Ecuador, Gabon, Ireland, Mauritius, the Russian Federation, Thailand and the United States of America.

If there is no objection, I shall consider the Credentials Committee constituted accordingly.

It was so decided.

The Temporary President: In this connection, may I invite the attention of the members of the Assembly to a note verbale from the Secretary-General dated 16 April 2001, in which it was stated that credentials should be issued for all representatives to the special session, in accordance with rule 27 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. I would urge all Members to submit the credentials of representatives to the Secretary-General as soon as possible.

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Election of the President

The Temporary President: The Commission on Human Settlements, acting as the Preparatory Committee for the twenty-fifth special session, recommends that the twenty-fifth special session should take place under the presidency of the President of the fifty-fifth regular session, His Excellency Mr. Harri Holkeri of Finland.

I take it that the Assembly wishes to elect Mr. Holkeri President of the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth special session by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The Temporary President: I extend my sincere congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Harri Holkeri and invite him to assume the presidency.

I request the Chief of Protocol to escort the President to the podium.

Mr. Holkeri took the Chair.

Address by Mr. Harri Holkeri, President of the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth special session

The President: I am delighted to welcome you all to the twenty-fifth special session of the United Nations General Assembly.

First of all, I wish to thank Mr. Kimmo Sasi, Minister for Foreign Trade of the Republic of Finland, for presiding over the opening of this meeting, prior to my election to this position. I am most grateful and honoured for my unanimous election. I pledge to superintend the session to a successful conclusion.

We live in an urbanizing world. We may say that we are at the beginning of an urban millennium. Less than a year ago, the leaders of the world gathered here, in this same Hall, at the Millennium Summit and expressed their firm commitment to achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million urban slum dwellers by the year 2020. They also resolved to halve poverty by the year 2015. Slums and poverty go together. Therefore, in working for better urban housing, we work towards reducing poverty.

Five years ago in Istanbul, at the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, the world community assembled and deliberated on how to cope with the increasing physical, economic, social and environmental demands of the rapidly urbanizing world. The collective wisdom of that Conference constitutes the Habitat Agenda, a global call to action at all levels to improve the conditions and quality of life in the world's cities, towns and villages.

The crux of the Habitat Agenda is to ensure adequate shelter for all and to make human settlements safer, healthier, more pleasant to live in, equitable and productive. The Habitat Agenda also pays attention to the promotion of gender equality and to the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease, and to stimulate sustainable development and the well-being of people.

In its resolution 52/190, the General Assembly decided to hold this special session of the Assembly to review and appraise progress made to implement the Habitat Agenda. What have we accomplished in the five years since Istanbul at the local, regional and international levels? What will need to be done in the future?

In the preceding months, during the preparatory phase of this session, many important and innovative ideas surfaced through the regional preparatory process. This special session is innovative in its structure. For the first time, we have a Thematic Committee to share experiences from different corners of the world and to learn from each other. In the programme of that Committee we will have the opportunity to listen to examples of implementation of many important issues and aspects pertaining to shelter, social development and the eradication of poverty, environmental management, governance, effective city development strategies and financing for urban development.

In the development of human settlements local government, civil society, trade unions, academia, various community groups and parliamentarians are important partners for Governments and the international community — I am referring here to the Habitat Agenda partners. I am happy to say that many of those partners are participating in this special session. I believe that people and partnerships constitute an important resource for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

With these introductory words, let me now call on the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan.

Statement by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General: The Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, whose fifth anniversary we mark with this special session, was not an isolated event. It was an integral part of the series of landmark conferences held by the United Nations during the 1990s. Although each conference had its own specific topic, they were all related to one another and to one overarching aim: to give men, women and children in cities and villages around the world the chance to share in the wealth and opportunities of our time.

The world is in the midst of a historic and radical transformation, not only in how people live, but also in where they live. A majority of the world's people are now city-dwellers, and the rapid increase in urbanization is expected to continue, with most of it occurring in the developing countries. Cities have always been crossroads of peoples and ideas and great founts of culture and innovation. Today, urban areas are the major driving forces of development and globalization.

But with the shift to cities, many of society's inequities and ills are also becoming more and more urban. Two thirds of the cities in the developing world do not have waste water treated. In countries with economies in transition, 75 per cent of solid waste is disposed of in open dumps. And everywhere we see stark contrasts: gritty slums and gleaming skyscrapers side by side in unplanned urban sprawl; conspicuous consumption alongside great pyramids of waste that threaten the environment and human health; and growing gaps between housing costs and housing supply, and between housing costs and the salaries offered by labour markets.

At the same time, we must not forget the needs of rural settlements and communities. After all, in developing countries the rapid rate of urbanization is caused mostly by past failures in rural development. Of the more than 1.2 billion global poor, three quarters live in rural areas. If humanity is to have a sustainable future, we must improve the lives of the poor everywhere.

The Istanbul Conference was an attempt to show that, with proper guidance, urbanization can be a positive force for the reduction of poverty and the achievement of sustainable development. Five years along the path of implementing the Habitat Agenda, a few points stand out.

One is the importance of partnership. Two thirds of the world's cities have established new public-private partnerships in the last five years. Most countries have adapted housing and other policies to

reflect internationally agreed principles. Such steps are not the work of States alone. Local authorities, non-governmental organizations, women's organizations and other civil society groups made enormous contributions. They spread the word, and they mobilized people and lobbied for change.

A second key point is urban governance. This is a precondition for economic efficiency and effective administration. A healthy society is one that gives all its members a chance to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Improved urban governance therefore implies greater democracy and strengthened local authorities. In particular, we must strengthen the role of women and ensure that all decision-makers, male and female, address the issues that affect women, who are the unsung heroes of poor urban areas.

A third very important issue facing tens of millions of urban families is the lack of secure tenure. In some cases, people have houses but lack titles to those houses, and they live in fear of arbitrary forced eviction. Others are engaged in business activities but lack licences to operate them. This absence of legal protection and support often leads to the enlargement of the informal sector, allowing people to put food on the table but inhibiting the ability of people to raise capital, attract investment and receive water and other basic services. We must reduce this insecurity and build up the legal and other infrastructures on which stable communities depend. Action in this area has the potential to create considerable wealth and to provide a major route out of poverty.

The world's cities face a long list of common challenges, which means that rich and poor nations should be able to find common ground. But progress will not happen without leadership. That is where you come in: you, the ministers and mayors responsible for urban policy; you, non-governmental organizations, women's groups and others in civil society. All of you, in your own way, are leaders who must answer to the inhabitants of the world's slums, favelas, barrios, ghettos, shanty-towns and squatter settlements.

Shelter is an often neglected aspect of economic and social development. Our challenge at this special session is to create lasting momentum for action on housing issues. If this session does its work well, you will agree on measures needed to implement not only the Habitat Agenda, but also the Millennium Declaration, in which the world's leaders pledged to achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020. You also have an opportunity to contribute to next year's World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

The world has entered the urban millennium. Let us rise to its many challenges. I wish you a very stimulating and productive session.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

Report of the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) (A/S-25/2)

The President: I now give the floor to the Chairman of the preparatory committee for the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Germán García Durán of Colombia.

Mr. García Durán (Colombia, Chairman of the preparatory committee for the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a great honour and pleasure for me to present to the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly the report of the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), as contained in document A/S-25/2.

This special session provides us with the opportunity to review and evaluate the progress made in implementing the Habitat programme and to identify additional actions to guide Governments and other relevant actors in the goal of turning promises into action. This is truly an enormous and historic responsibility, which we all share.

The Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the special session has been working diligently to ensure that the session will truly contribute towards moving the Habitat Agenda forward. The preparatory committee began work in May 1999, in accordance with the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 53/180. An

organizational session of the preparatory committee was held in May 1999, during the seventeenth session of the Commission. The members of the current Bureau and the preparatory committee were elected for a term of office that covered the entire preparatory period.

At the national level, Governments were encouraged to organize national Habitat committees in order to coordinate the process of preparing national reports. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the 96 national reports received indicate that great progress has been made towards fulfilling the commitments. However, more effective action is needed in all areas.

The first substantive session of the preparatory committee was held in Nairobi in May 2000 and considered the following issues: the scope of the special session of the General Assembly; local, national and regional preparations for the special session; the role of local authorities, other partners and relevant United Nations organizations and agencies in the review and appraisal process; and the preparation of a draft declaration. At the conclusion of that session, the Secretariat was requested to prepare an initial draft of the declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium.

At the regional level, Habitat and the regional economic commissions jointly organized five regional meetings between September and November 2000. Four of the regional meetings adopted declarations, while one concluded with a strategy for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

Inter-agency meetings on the coordinated implementation of the Habitat Agenda by the United Nations system were held in New York and Nairobi. In order to consult Member States, the Secretariat organized an expert group meeting in November 2000, with a financial contribution from the Government of Sweden and the support of the city of Vasteras, Sweden. All States members of the Commission on Human Settlements, as well as relevant international associations, local authorities and non-governmental organizations, were invited. A partners' meeting on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda was held in Nairobi in February 2001, prior to the second substantive session of the preparatory committee, and about 300 new partners were accredited to the special session during the second session of the preparatory committee.

The draft declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium was considered during the second substantive session of the preparatory committee. Most of the paragraphs were adopted by consensus; exceptions were paragraphs 8, 24, 33, 34, 37, 42 and 49, which were wholly or partly bracketed. Following informal consultations this week, the number of bracketed paragraphs was reduced to five, and an enormous amount of progress has been made towards agreement on them.

We should therefore continue with our deliberations in the Committee of the Whole during this special session so as to arrive at a final agreement on these matters, which will require genuine political will and the taking of responsible political decisions in a spirit of partnership and cooperation — the spirit of Istanbul. I sincerely hope that all who attend the meetings of this special session will make a great and substantive contribution to this process.

The second session of the preparatory committee also reviewed the draft report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The revised version of this report on the review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, which is contained in documents A/S-25/3 and A/S-25/3/Add.1, is before the Assembly. This broad report takes fully into account the comments made by delegations during the preparatory committee's second session and summarizes the national reports received by the Centre. The report is thus the principal document for the special session.

Intense discussions resulted in a decision being made during the second session of the preparatory committee regarding the establishment of a Thematic Committee. This Committee represents an innovation in the United Nations and was subsequently approved by General Assembly resolution 55/246 of 21 March 2001.

The preparatory committee further adopted four decisions: on arrangements regarding accreditation of Habitat Agenda partners to the special session; further arrangements regarding accreditation of Habitat Agenda partners to the special session; the preparatory process for the Thematic Committee; and recommendations of the Economic and Social Council.

Although difficult at times, the preparatory process was transparent and extensive, allowing for the

participation of all Member States and observers as well as of organizations of the United Nations system and partners from non-governmental organizations and civil society.

In conclusion, I would like to acknowledge with thanks the hard work and the contributions of my colleagues in the Bureau and of the Habitat secretariat, who have been making enormous sacrifices in the course of the negotiation period. This has been a true team effort, and I am convinced that they will continue their excellent work in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of this special session.

The President: I thank the Chairman of the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly for his statement. The General Assembly is grateful to him and to those who participated in the preparatory process for their efforts to get this special session off to a good start.

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Organization of the session

Draft decision II (A/S-25/2, para. 62)

The President: Members are invited to turn to draft decision II, recommended by the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the twenty-fifth special session in paragraph 62 of its report contained in document A/S-25/2.

Draft decision II is entitled "Organizational arrangements for the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly".

May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to adopt draft decision II?

Draft decision II was adopted.

The President: On the basis of the decision just taken by the General Assembly on the recommendations of the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the special session, the following arrangements shall apply to the twenty-fifth special session.

The Vice-Presidents of the twenty-fifth special session shall be the same as those of the fifty-fifth regular session of the General Assembly. The Vice-Presidents of the fifty-fifth regular session are the following Member States: Belarus, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, China, the Comoros, El Salvador, France, Gabon, Guinea, Haiti, Kuwait, Maldives, Mozambique, the Russian Federation, Suriname, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, Uzbekistan and Yemen.

If there is no objection, I shall take it that the Assembly decides to elect by acclamation those States Vice-Presidents of the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly.

It was so decided.

The President: Regarding the Chairpersons of the six Main Committees of the twenty-fifth special session, the Chairpersons of the Main Committees of the fifty-fifth regular session shall serve in the same capacity at the special session.

The Chairpersons of the Main Committees at the fifty-fifth regular session are the following: of the First Committee, U Mya Than of Myanmar; of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), Mr. Matia Mulumba Semakula Kiwanuka of Uganda; of the Second Committee, Mr. Alexandru Niculescu of Romania; of the Third Committee, Mrs. Yvonne Gittens-Joseph of Trinidad and Tobago; of the Fifth Committee, Mr. Gert Rosenthal of Guatemala; of the Sixth Committee, Mr. Mauro Politi of Italy.

If there is no objection, I take it that the Assembly decides to elect by acclamation those representatives Chairpersons of the Main Committees at the twenty-fifth special session.

It was so decided.

The President: As concerns the First Committee, in the absence of its Chairman, Mr. Abdelkader Mesdoua of Algeria, Vice-Chairman of the First Committee, has been designated to act as Chairman of that Committee for the duration of the special session.

As concerns the Special Political and Decolonization (Fourth) Committee, in the absence of its Chairman, Mr. Patrick Albert Lewis of Antigua and Barbuda, Vice-Chairman of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), has been designated to act as Chairman of that Committee for the duration of the special session.

As concerns the Sixth Committee, in the absence of its Chairman, Mr. Marcelo Vázquez of Ecuador,

Vice-Chairman of the Sixth Committee, has been designated to act as Chairman of that Committee for the duration of the special session.

In adopting the recommendations of the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee, the Assembly has established an ad hoc committee of the whole, which will be designated Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the twenty-fifth special session.

In accordance with the decision just taken by the General Assembly, the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole will be a full member of the General Committee of the twenty-fifth special session.

Concerning the election of the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole, the preparatory committee recommends that its Chairman, Mr. Germán García Durán of Colombia, serve in the same capacity in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly at its twenty-fifth special session to elect Mr. Germán García Durán by acclamation Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

It was so decided.

The President: I congratulate Mr. Germán García Durán on behalf of the General Assembly and on my own behalf, and I wish him well in the important and onerous responsibilities that he has just assumed for the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

In adopting the recommendations of the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee, the General Assembly has established a thematic committee which will be designated Thematic Committee of the twenty-fifth special session.

In accordance with the decision just taken by the General Assembly, the Chairperson of the Thematic Committee will be a full member of the General Committee of the twenty-fifth special session.

Concerning the election of the Chairperson of the Thematic Committee, I should like to inform members that Mr. Slaheddine Belaid of Tunisia has been nominated as Chairperson of the Thematic Committee.

I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to elect Mr. Slaheddine Belaid by acclamation Chairperson of the Thematic Committee.

It was so decided.

The President: I congratulate Mr. Slaheddine Belaid on behalf of the General Assembly and on my own behalf and wish him well in the important responsibilities that he has just assumed for the Thematic Committee.

The General Committee of the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly has now been fully constituted.

We turn now to matters concerning the participation of speakers other than Member States in the work of the special session.

On the basis of the decision just taken by the General Assembly, observers may make statements in the debate in plenary. Organizations and entities having received a standing invitation to participate as observers in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly may participate in the twenty-fifth special session as observers. States members of the specialized agencies of the United Nations that are not Members of the United Nations may participate in the work of the twenty-fifth special session as observers.

The following associate members of the regional commissions may participate in the twenty-fifth special session as observers: American Samoa, Anguilla, Aruba, the British Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, Montserrat, the Netherlands Antilles, New Caledonia, Niue, Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands.

Subject to the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, entities of the United Nations system, including programmes, funds, specialized agencies and regional commissions, with specific expertise in the subject matter of the special session may make statements in the debate in plenary, provided that they are represented at the highest level. Representatives of the United Nations system may also make statements in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole and in the Thematic Committee.

In accordance with the decision just taken by the General Assembly, representatives of local authorities, non-governmental organizations and other Habitat Agenda partners may make statements in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole and in the Thematic Committee. Given the time available, a limited number of representatives of local authorities, non-

governmental organizations and other Habitat Agenda partners may make statements in the debate in plenary. In this connection, the President of the General Assembly was requested to submit the list of selected Habitat Agenda partners to Member States for approval and to ensure that the selection was made on an equal and transparent basis, taking into account the geographical representation and diversity of Habitat Agenda partners. In this connection, members will recall my letter of 1 June 2001 addressed to all Permanent Representatives.

Taking into account further information provided by the Secretariat, I should now like to propose to the Assembly the following 11 selected Habitat Agenda partners: African Centre for Empowerment, Gender and Advocacy; Global Parliamentarians for Habitat; Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood; Habitat International Coalition; Habitat Professional Forum; International Confederation of Free Trade Unions; NGO Committee on Human Settlements; Society for the Promotion of Area Resources Centres/Asia Women and Shelter Network; Women and Shelter Network, Latin American and Caribbean Region; World Association of Cities and Local Authorities Co-ordination; and Youth for Habitat.

May I take it that the Assembly agrees that representatives from these 11 selected Habitat Agenda partners may make statements in the debate in the plenary of the special session?

It was so decided.

The President: Those 11 organizations will therefore be added to the list of speakers, and their statements will be limited to five minutes.

By adopting the recommendations of the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee, the General Assembly has decided that the last two speaking slots at each plenary meeting, with the exception of the first and last meetings, will be reserved for participants other than Member States, the Holy See, Switzerland and Palestine, provided they are represented at the highest level. In this connection, further to the letter I addressed to the Permanent Representatives, and taking into account further information provided by the Secretariat, I propose to Members the following speakers for those eight spots. For the plenary meeting this afternoon, I propose the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the President of the World Association of Cities and Local Authorities. For the plenary meeting to be held on Thursday morning, 7 June, the proposed speakers are the President of the Habitat Professional Forum and the President of the Global Parliamentarians for Habitat. For the plenary meeting on Thursday afternoon, the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Chairperson of the NGO Committee on Human Settlements. Finally, for the plenary meeting on Friday morning, 8 June, the Director of the United Nations Environment Programme and the President of the Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood.

I take it that the General Assembly endorses the list of speakers for the eight reserved spots.

It was so decided.

The President: I should like to remind delegates that statements in the debate in plenary meetings are limited to five minutes.

In accordance with the decision just adopted by the Assembly, there will be six plenary meetings over the three-day period, with two meetings per day: from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. I should like to inform Members that I intend to start the plenary meetings promptly at 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. In this connection, I would like to assure the Assembly that I will try to be in the Chair punctually at the scheduled time. I sincerely hope that all delegations will make all special efforts to cooperate in this regard.

With regard to the length of statements in the debate in the plenary, I should like to remind delegates that, on the basis of the decision just adopted by the Assembly, all statements in the debate in the plenary shall be limited to five minutes. In connection with the time limits, a light system has been installed at the speaker's rostrum, which functions as follows: a green light will be activated at the start of the speaker's statement; an orange light will be activated 30 seconds before the end of the five minutes; and a red light will be activated when the five-minute limit has elapsed. I should like to appeal to speakers in the debate in plenary meeting to cooperate in observing the time limits of their statements, so that all those inscribed on the list of speakers for a given meeting will be heard at that meeting.

I should now like to draw the attention of delegates to a matter concerning the participation of Palestine, in its capacity as observer, in the sessions and work of the General Assembly.

Members will recall General Assembly resolution 52/250 of 7 July 1998 and its annex, as well as a note by the Secretary-General contained in document A/52/1002 that outlines the Secretary-General's understanding of the implementation of the modalities annexed to the resolution.

I should like to draw your attention in particular to paragraph 6 of the annex to resolution 52/250, which reads as follows:

> "The right to make interventions, with a precursory explanation or the recall of relevant General Assembly resolutions being made only once by the President of the General Assembly at the start of each session of the Assembly."

Accordingly, for the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly, the observer of Palestine will participate in the work of the General Assembly in accordance with General Assembly resolution 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974, resolution 43/177 of 15 December 1988 and resolution 52/250 of 7 July 1998, with no further need for a precursory explanation prior to any intervention by Palestine in this special session.

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Adoption of the agenda

The President: The provisional agenda of the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly is contained in document A/S-25/1, which has been recommended for adoption by the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the twenty-fifth special session in draft decision I, in paragraph 62 of its report contained in document A/S-25/2.

In order to expedite its work, the Assembly may wish to consider the provisional agenda directly in plenary meeting, without referring it to the General Committee.

May I take it that the General Assembly agrees to this procedure?

It was so decided.

The President: May I take it, then, that the Assembly wishes to adopt the provisional agenda as it appears in document A/S-25/1?

It was so decided.

The President: Regarding the allocation of items, on the basis of the decision taken by the General Assembly, all the items on the agenda are to be considered directly in plenary meetings. In addition, items 8, 9 and 10 have also been allocated to the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-Fifth Special Session for consideration, on the understanding that the debate on those items shall take place in plenary.

Agenda item 8

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Note by the Secretary-General (A/S-25/3 and Add.1)

Agenda item 9

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Agenda item 10

Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gennady Novitsky, Deputy Prime Minister of Belarus.

Mr. Novitsky (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in 1996, drew the attention of the international community to the problem of cities. We deem it important, during this special session of the General Assembly, to consider the matter of how the recommendations of that Conference are being implemented. This is of particular importance in view of the preparations for, and the holding of, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in September 2002.

Our delegation fully supports the report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and the recommendations made to

all participants in the global process to involve themselves in efforts to achieve sustainable development. We must give priority to the development of appropriate national legislation.

At the present stage of its development, Belarus is laying the foundation for a socially oriented market economy. Belarus has a large industrial, agricultural and intellectual capacity. Our country is playing an increasingly important role in meeting the challenges of the world community with a view to attaining the goals of sustainable development. Since 1992 Belarus has been carrying out a housing reform, with the goal of guaranteeing our citizens' constitutional right to acquire property and to build, reconstruct or lease housing facilities.

In order to resolve the problems of the comprehensive development of human settlements in the light of the recommendations of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, five years ago in Belarus we set up a national commission to develop human settlements on the basis of partnership among the central, regional and local administration. The commission is seeking to strengthen the economic basis of cities, to provide housing to those in need, to improve communications networks and to protect the environment.

The Commission has worked out a basic urban planning document — a State plan for the nationwide territorial organization of the Republic of Belarus. This national plan for the Republic was endorsed by our Government in 2000. Pursuant to the plan, our Republic has laid down and is consistently carrying out a strategy aimed at building a new generation of houses. That strategy consists of enhancing the quality of housing facilities. We are using new construction methods and better construction materials, and the quality of the new housing has increased significantly.

A new and promising area is the comprehensive reconstruction of residential areas through increased density. We are setting up a fund for public housing and building new, high-quality apartments.

In summing up the work done so far by the Commission, we can say that we have succeeded in maximizing cooperation among the organs of the various authorities at different levels. Indeed, the Commission is helping to create the necessary conditions for the sustainable development of towns in our Republic.

The Chernobyl accident was an enormous problem for our country and caused tremendous damage. About 70 per cent of the radioactive fallout after the explosion landed on Belarus. As a result, we were forced to seal off 485 human settlements and to resettle 135,000 people. We had to build 65,000 apartments and houses to accommodate those people.

The total damage caused to Belarus by the Chernobyl catastrophe was, according to some calculations, $235 billion, a sum 30 times larger than the 1985 national annual budget of Belarus. Quite clearly, the scale of the radiation load is out of all proportion with the funds we have available. Accordingly, we hope to see expanded cooperation with the United Nations system to try to minimize the consequences of that horrendous manmade twentieth-century disaster.

Allow me to brief the Assembly about some of the national measures that have been undertaken by Belarus to prepare for this international forum.

First, the national commission was designated to act as the preparatory committee. Secondly, we studied the recommendations of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) on collecting and analysing information on the development of human settlements over the last five years, in order to prepare national reports. Thirdly, we prepared an inter-agency national report reflecting the situation, the problems and the development trends of the cities of our Republic.

We hope that the information provided, which is both analytic and forward-looking, will be included in the global report as part of the overall picture of urbanization throughout the world.

In conclusion, allow me to take note of and to commend the contribution made by the United Nations, and in particular by the Commission on Human Settlements, in the process of the sustainable development of cities. I should like in particular to note the work done by the secretariat of the United Nations Office in Nairobi in preparing for this special session.

Let me also take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Habitat experts for what they have done in Belarus. They have helped us to elaborate and carry out a number of specific projects and programmes. Allow me to voice the hope that the goal of the sustainable development of human settlements

will be promoted, during the special session, by the declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium.

We believe that it is important to maintain and expand a consistent, balanced type of international cooperation within the framework of this important document. Furthermore, the interests of States that are at different stages of the process of socio-economic development have to be taken into account.

We hope that, in the third millennium, our overall potential and our common experience in resolving global problems will provide a fresh impetus to the development of human civilization.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Husni Abu-Gheida, Minister of Public Work and Housing of Jordan.

Mr. Abu-Gheida (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased, Mr. President, to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your election; this reflects the Assembly's confidence in you as leaders of this special session. We trust, Sir, that your wisdom and patience will guide us to positive decisions that will help address humanity's growing needs in terms of sustainable development at a time of accelerating urbanization, particularly in developing countries.

We support the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) as it coordinates the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, and we support the Centre's activities at the regional and international levels. Jordan is among the countries that makes significant voluntary contributions to the Centre. Beginning in 1979 it hosted the regional office for the Arab countries. We provided financial and logistical support for many of the programmes and activities that preceded the 1996 Istanbul Conference, and have participated on the Arab and international levels in their preparation and implementation. We hope that Habitat will consider reopening the regional office in my country's capital, Amman, so that it can make a contribution to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in the Arab region.

My Government's commitment to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and to the Centre is crystal clear, as reflected in our political will to adopt measures with respect to the housing sector and to liberalization of the land market and of financing. Believing that the human being should be the focus of development efforts, my country has been able to provide secure ownership of property for some 300,000 people who had been squatting on State land by offering them that land at a token price; in that way, we sustain the human right of basic shelter through the improvement of financial and social infrastructures and by ensuring public safety within internationally acceptable standards.

Many public-private partnerships have been established to provide housing and to make the housing system more just and transparent, and to create a mortgage market that provides long-term financing for low-income or limited-income families.

Development in the Arab region faces total collapse owing to the war imposed on the Palestinian people, the violence of the Israeli army of occupation, incursions into Palestinian towns and cities, the destruction of civilian housing, the confiscation of land and the spread of Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory. Here I would refer to Security Council resolutions 446 (1979) and 465 (1980) on the illegality of such settlements and on the threat they pose to the attainment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East — quite apart from the harmful effects on Palestinian communities and the negative socio-economic impact on the citizens of Palestine and of the occupied Syrian Golan, as highlighted by the General Assembly in many resolutions. I would refer also to the report of the Mitchell Fact-Finding Committee, which called for a complete freeze of illegal Israeli settlements; that was indeed the main focus of the report.

There can be no development without just, lasting and comprehensive peace. Jordan and Egypt have submitted specific proposals for ending the aggression against the Palestinian people, for lifting the blockade imposed upon it and for putting in place appropriate conditions for the resumption of the peace process. The international community has already welcomed that Arab effort, and views it as further proof of our nation's orientation towards peace.

We believe in the premise of a collective responsibility to achieve peace and stability in the world and in our region in particular, which has implications for urban development. We therefore appeal for the provision of the protection that the Palestinian people need. We call for assistance to the Palestinian people in achieving self-determination and

in establishing an independent State on its national soil with holy Jerusalem as its capital. We call for an end to all forms of occupation and tension in our region, both in the Golan Heights and in southern Lebanon, and, of course, for an end to the blockade against Iraq.

Let us all work together to protect the environment and to promote peace and human welfare.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Josefina Vazquez Mota, Minister of Social Development of Mexico.

Ms. Vazquez Mota (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me at this important forum to convey my greetings to ministers, heads of delegation and legislators from the countries participating in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

Mexico and the rest of the world are today in the midst of profound change, few of them as relevant as the urbanization of developing countries. Many of the challenges posed by the process of urbanization were recognized by the nations that were present at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held at Istanbul in 1996, where proposals were made and specific objectives established for participating countries. Over the past five years, Mexico has made progress towards meeting those objectives.

We have adapted our legal framework for urban planning to give greater power to local authorities. We have fought poverty and promoted gender equality.

On environmental issues, Mexico has adopted the principles of Agenda 21, and with respect to housing, we are now in the process of establishing a national housing council which will organize and coordinate the public and private productive sectors to bolster the housing market and to facilitate financing. We are also making progress on strategies for land management and urban development. This has led to the better-balanced growth of Mexican cities.

Yet we still face major challenges. Mexico's rural population is widely dispersed, and our population is largely concentrated in four major metropolitan areas. In addition we have seen new phenomena in the process of urbanization, such as the formation of new metropolitan areas, of a megalopolis and of urban corridors.

As a result, the management of human settlements, careful, systematic planning of urban development and housing supply in harmony with the environment and with respect for natural resources are all of special relevance to Mexico; these are basic issues for this special session.

The national development plan presented to our people just a few days ago by President Vicente Fox incorporates land management, regional and urban development and the construction of housing, with special attention to two major components: social and human development; and growth with quality. Those topics are given priority on our national agenda.

Mexico is well aware that the challenges of urbanization require a comprehensive view of development, including environmental, social, cultural, economic and political aspects. In that framework, Mexico wishes to present to the Assembly four fundamental proposals.

First, a link should be established between environmental and urban development activities both in national policy and in the proposals made and the work done by various international forums and organizations.

Secondly, it is necessary to group together and to consider the problems that are shared by a number of countries, for example those of the Latin American and Caribbean region, in order to develop regional action plans.

Our third proposal is to develop budgetary instruments and incentives, devised in consultation with our legislators, with a view to enhancing urban governability and relating the process of decentralization to integral land management and urban development policies.

Fourthly, we must consider five different territorial scales attending the urbanization and land development process: the regional, megalopolitan and metropolitan levels, urban corridors and population centres. In this context, the coordination of metropolitan areas is one of the major challenges of today's world. In order to coordinate the development of a metropolis in which various municipal and state authorities interact requires policies to be attuned to these different levels of government and efficient mechanisms to make use of shared potential and infrastructure. We also propose international

cooperation for the financing of studies or projects for metropolitan coordination, including exchanges of successful technologies and experiences among countries.

Urban population is growing quickly in the third world and poverty has thus become more urbanized. Squatter settlements, poverty belts and low-income areas, which are generally at great risk in times of natural disaster, are often part of the picture in the developing countries. Disasters caused by natural phenomena undoubtedly affect the poorest and the cost of disasters is always higher than that of investment in preventive action. It is therefore essential that further work be done in the field of land-use management in order to mitigate the consequences of natural disasters.

We must also recognize the patrimonial needs of our poorest population. Having a patrimony is a source of security for families and ensuring that the neediest hold title to property, appropriately documenting their patrimony, will be an integral part of fighting poverty in Mexico.

We propose from this high rostrum that the Habitat Centre promote a world campaign for education and awareness of the meaning of habitat. Consolidating the habitat culture in our societies would lead to structural and progressive changes in our citizens' lives.

The century ahead is rich in challenges. The most important of these is to fulfil the range of commitments that will allow us to have an increasingly harmonious, just and sustainable world. The rapid growth of world population must be organized around land and urban development in balance with the environment and with economic growth. We recognize that we cannot leave it all to the State and to the cold calculations of supply and demand.

Talking about habitat means talking about the human being as the starting point and the end-user of all of our decisions. Disorderly demographic growth, the over-exploitation of habitat, lack of infrastructure and opportunities, and decreasing levels of education will lead our countries towards poverty, marginalization and a progressive crumbling of the social fabric. If we do not act today with firmness and conviction, we will be compromising the right to life of future generations.

For this purpose, we need concrete and effective cooperation from the developed countries and international organizations, allowing financial and institutional resources to be channelled towards that end. We all know that poverty is the enemy of peace, development and democracy. For all of these reasons, Mexico reiterates its unequivocal commitment to the principles of the Habitat Agenda in order to find formulas to remedy the failings of management and the lack of resources for urban development, land-use planning and housing, so that we may achieve better standards of living for our societies.

This is a new day for Mexico: a new day of democracy, a new day of change and of hope. We in Mexico believe that this must be a new day for habitat.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Sankie Mthembi-Mahanyele, Minister of Housing of South Africa.

Ms. Mthembi-Mahanyele (South Africa): After years of colonial and apartheid planning in South Africa, the country has come a long way, from focusing on undoing and redressing past injustices to introducing new policies and strategies based on principles of integration and sustainability, people-driven development, satisfying basic needs, transparency and nation-building. Our Constitution, adopted in 1996, provides the cornerstone for all policy and legislation. Its Bill of Rights provides for a rights-based approach to governance, development and justice.

Within this context, one of the key priorities of our Government this year is to make a decisive and integrated contribution towards meeting the economic challenges our country faces. President Thabo Mbeki, in his state-of-the-nation address in February 2001, indicated that investment in economic infrastructure will be prioritized to support high-growth areas. He announced that the priority economic growth sectors are tourism, agriculture and energy, and we recognize that sustainable settlements are vital to the development of these sectors.

R6 billion, equivalent to $750 million, have been allocated over the next three years for the implementation of an integrated rural sustainable development strategy and an urban renewal programme in South Africa. These programmes are aimed at implementing a sustained campaign against rural and urban poverty and underdevelopment by, amongst other

things, investing in economic and social infrastructure, human resource development, enterprise development, the enhancement of the developmental capacity of local government, poverty alleviation and the strengthening of the criminal justice system. The Ministry of Housing is actively involved in these programmes to ensure that human settlement and housing issues are well integrated into these important national priorities.

The fundamental objectives we seek to achieve nationally are driving our economy into a high-growth path by increasing its competitiveness and efficiency, raising employment levels, reducing poverty and addressing persistent inequalities.

The Government of South Africa is grateful to the international community for its support towards our achieving our vision of adequate and sustainable human settlements. In striving towards the achievement of an African renaissance, we recognize the important coordinating role which the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) can fulfil in building links and sharing best practices in our region. We therefore look forward to a strengthening of the Centre as an acknowledgement of the important role it plays, particularly in our region.

South Africa, furthermore, supports the Centre's global campaigns for good governance and secure tenure as cornerstones for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. We would accordingly report on the implementation of these themes in our country.

We support the principle of the maximum devolution of governance and that of strong local government as key to the successful implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Our second round of participatory democratic municipal elections has been successful and the reorganization and rationalization of our municipalities is proceeding. The Municipal Systems Act of 2000 provides for integrated development planning processes and for performance-based local government, which is beginning to make its impact felt in the area of good local governance.

South Africa has focused its efforts and commitment on a democratic, sustainable process of housing development that gives priority to the needs of the poor and special focus groups in our society. Those include youths, the elderly, persons with disabilities, women and victims of HIV/AIDS. Second, it involves meaningful and wide-ranging consultative processes with affected individuals and communities. Third, it provides for as wide a choice of tenure options as possible, with emphasis on full title, without neglecting informal land rights and rental options. Fourth, it ensures as wide a choice of housing and tenure options as is reasonable and affordable. Fifth, it is economically, fiscally, socially and financially affordable and sustainable. Sixth, it is based on the principle of integrated development planning. Seventh, it is administered in a transparent, accountable and equitable manner and upholds the practice of good governance. It also encourages and supports individuals and communities in their efforts to fulfil their own housing needs by assisting them, through the People's Housing Process, in accessing land, services and technical assistance in a way that leads to the transfer of skills to the community. And it promotes environmentally sound human settlements through a wide range of interventions that place emphasis on energy efficiency, water efficiency and sustainable greening of the living environment.

One of South Africa's key successes is the fact that the right to adequate housing is enshrined in the Constitution. In order to satisfy that right, the housing programme has delivered over 1,155,300 houses; and, to date, close to more than 5 million people have been housed. The South African presentation to the Thematic Committee will provide more detail in this regard.

When South Africa committed itself to the Habitat Agenda, in 1996, a number of the concepts embodied in the Agenda were already being implemented through the Reconstruction and Development Programme. Since then, many advances have been made in our persistent efforts to fight poverty and underdevelopment in all sectors of society. Despite those advances, after six years we are still faced with daunting challenges. We are concentrating our efforts on bridging gaps and planning our housing programme in such a way that it responds to a dynamic housing environment, especially the strategic needs of our main target group, the poor.

Challenges that require our special attention include confronting and managing the social, economic and legal impacts of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on our human settlements programmes. On this basis, we are undertaking research on the impacts of the epidemic on the housing sector as a whole. Secondly, we are promoting informal settlement eradication, inner city renewal and safer cities free from crime.

With regard to poverty eradication, the target group for our national housing programme is the poor. We feel the issue of poverty is closely linked to the housing problems we face, which include homelessness and informal settlements. In this regard, we are examining the sustainability of the current housing subsidy programme so that it can continue to contribute towards meeting the housing needs of the poor, thus contributing towards poverty alleviation.

The housing subsidy programme targets poverty by empowering the poor to participate in the economy by giving them shelter that they can utilize for economic purposes as small enterprise bases; empowering small and emerging contractors by awarding housing construction contracts on an affirmative procurement basis; empowering women through the People's Housing Process to acquire skills to provide their own housing and to participate in the construction sector; and generating employment, because our housing construction projects promote the employment of local communities and the use of local suppliers of materials.

South Africa is also working to develop mechanisms to expand access to housing credit and finance to potential housing beneficiaries, especially those with incomes of less than 2,000 rand per month — which is the equivalent of $250 — to assist them to improve the houses provided through the subsidy programme. To that end, the Ministry of Housing is developing a national savings initiative whose major aim will be to link savings, credit and the subsidy to allow potential beneficiaries to contribute and actively participate in their housing provision.

In conclusion, South Africa is committed to the existing international partnerships we have. We believe that there are valuable lessons to be learned from each other. We also believe that continuing to support each other through our strengths, skills and experiences will assist all of us in achieving our common goals, focused on a sustainable future for all, especially the poor and the homeless in our communities.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Lars-Erik Lövdén, Minister for Housing of Sweden.

Mr. Lövdén (Sweden): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and the associated countries. I am pleased to take the floor at this crucial session for the review and appraisal of the Habitat Agenda.

Aware that five years is a short period, we have gathered to critically assess how we have tackled all the challenges that are implicit in the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda, and how, in our future action, we will deal with these. The world's people in urban and rural areas, especially those living in poverty, are dependent upon us to fulfil the commitments of Istanbul.

We all know that urbanization is a complex phenomenon affecting all parts of the world, and one which raises fundamental political issues that must be addressed in order to achieve an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable society. It is about empowering people and creating decent and healthy living conditions. It is about achieving social equity and an environmentally sound future. We need to develop adequate services, facilities, transport and other types of social infrastructure, as well as integrated spatial planning, which take into account the important connections between urban and rural areas. These are important political challenges that we, ministers charged with human settlements issues, face and have to meet.

A key to success is good governance — the promotion of transparent, responsible, accountable, just, effective and efficient governance of towns, cities and metropolitan areas.

The follow-up to the Istanbul Conference calls for a more decisive approach and a strategic mobilization of political will to ensure the full implementation of the Habitat Agenda in the future. In order to make our commitments clear and decisive we must raise awareness about human settlements challenges and give this special session a powerful, visionary political message: that our endeavour to improve living conditions for all — especially those living in poverty and slums and the homeless — will result in concrete action and not just in words.

As emphasized in the Habitat Agenda, the sustainable development of cities and other human settlements is fundamental to economic growth, social and cultural progress and environmental protection. Bearing this in mind, we find it worrying to note that the concentration of poverty, homelessness and slums is increasingly associated with the growth of the world's urban population. The right to adequate shelter

for all is far from realized, even in developed countries. The question of combating social exclusion is specifically mentioned in the European Union Treaty of Amsterdam, and has been dealt with in several meetings held among European heads of State and Government. We must do our utmost to promote enabling approaches for people with limited resources to house themselves, as well as to increase financial resources for low-income housing, including transparent and financially sustainable subsidies.

Mainstreaming gender perspective in human settlements is crucial in order to achieve full implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Special efforts must be made to counteract discrimination against women, especially in respect of their security of tenure and their individual right to own property.

Making globalization work effectively for those living in poverty is, of course, a moral imperative for Governments, the private sector and civil society alike in both North and South. The primary responsibility for sustainable development and the eradication of poverty lies with national Governments. As agreed in the Millennium Declaration, the international community has a joint responsibility to achieve, by 2015, the international development target of reducing by half the proportion of the world's people whose income is less than $1 a day, as well as to achieve, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers, as proposed in the Cities Without Slums initiative. To this end, the European Union urges that efforts should be strengthened towards the fulfilment of the agreed official development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product.

The European Union believes that concrete actions should be considered while we continue to fulfil our commitments made in Istanbul. For instance, we should spare no effort to promote access to safe drinking water for all and to facilitate the provision of basic infrastructure and urban services.

We sincerely believe that local authorities are essential to further implement the Habitat Agenda. They are the closest partners to citizens, historically linked with the fulfilment of their basic needs. Increasing cooperation, based on agreed principles, between all levels of Government, is therefore required.

In this regard, we should, in accordance with national legislation, strengthen the capacities of local governments, in particular their financial capacities. We should also devolve responsibility and transfer financial resources to local governments to promote linked coherent actions, specifically to promote provision of land, adequate infrastructure and basic services.

The Habitat Agenda cannot be fully implemented without inclusive cooperation between all Habitat partners. The cooperation between Governments, non-governmental organizations and representatives from local authorities and the private sector is of particular importance in order to promote a participatory citizenship. We also need to address the need to adopt more sustainable production and consumption patterns.

Given the crucial role that cities and other human settlements have to play in sustainable development, the outcome of Istanbul+5 will be an important contribution to Rio+10, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, in Johannesburg next year. The Habitat Agenda offers valuable tools for the handling of many of the issues of Agenda 21. It is therefore of utmost importance to reflect on how we best can build on the existing fundamental links between the Habitat Agenda and Agenda 21.

This special session gives the international community an important opportunity to express its political will to identify and endorse ways of realizing a better world with adequate shelter for all and sustainable development of human settlements. These are political challenges for which we, ministers charged with human settlements issues, have a responsibility in our pursuit of peace, justice and democracy through economic, cultural, social and environmental development. The European Union is committed to continuing to actively work to achieve these important intentions, and we are happy to invite the Assembly to take part in the European Union measures and intentions in connection with the Habitat Agenda, as described in a booklet that will be distributed.

The President: I should like to appeal to the speakers in the debate to respect as much as possible the given five-minute time limit.

I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sadiq Baksh, Minister of Housing and Settlements of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Baksh (Trinidad and Tobago): I am honoured to participate in the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly.

Today is the first year of the new millennium, the year 2001. We have come together to support a global effort that will change the development standards for human settlements during the rest of the twenty-first century.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago would like to commend the United Nations for its renewed vigour in dealing with the issues of globalization and underdevelopment, notably the issue of poverty eradication. We in Trinidad and Tobago have, in our own way, become part of the global campaigns for security of tenure and urban governance. With Habitat and our local voluntary sector and local government institutions as our partners, we have sought to raise awareness and to improve national policies and local strategies to reduce urban poverty. About this and other major issues, we have been thinking globally and acting locally.

Our Government is firmly committed to democracy. We consider social inclusion and justice, as well as the promotion of more transparent and accountable institutions, to be as indispensable to democracy as are free and fair elections. By these standards, democracy is alive and well in Trinidad and Tobago.

Participation and partnership, to the extent and in the spirit envisaged by the Agenda, are nothing new to Trinidad and Tobago. We have many very active non-governmental organizations (NGOs), some of which are allied to international NGOs.

We also have several mechanisms, including a national self-help commission, and many government agencies that facilitate and support voluntary activities in such areas as housing, health and the development of women. Because of this participatory approach to urban and rural development, the need for shelter, the empowerment of women and the need to provide comfort to the landless and dispossessed, Trinidad and Tobago has made substantial progress since the last Habitat Conference.

We have adopted a number of strategies, including legislation, more appropriate institutional support structures and a supportive environment for increasing the land and housing stock through multiple and "smart" partnerships.

Now in our second term in office, our Government has benefited from the experiences gained during the first term and has reshaped our approach to development in the context of a number of national objectives.

These are sustainable growth, an intelligent nation, more and better jobs, a faster pace of development, a better quality of life for all of our citizens, peace, security and harmony, greater equity in our society and a competitive economy, which all impact on the goal of providing sustainable human settlements. Trinidad and Tobago is faced with the challenge of providing 40,000 shelter solutions over the next five years. Forty per cent will target squatter and low-income households. Our national nine-point plan will succeed only if the potential of this large, dynamic, entrepreneurial and innovative informal and low-income sector is harnessed and used creatively.

In the area of legislation, we have introduced four major Acts of Parliament to rationalize the land registration, planning and land use policies and systems of the country to make delivery of land and housing products more efficient, available and affordable for citizens. Our Government has also re-shaped its ministerial portfolios to focus on delivery. Local government authorities, in particular, will now have an increased role to play in strengthening the links between the enlightened economic policies of our Government and the management of land and housing.

Perhaps the greatest success of Trinidad and Tobago in addressing the housing needs of its citizens is in partnering with groups in civil society. Government focus has shifted to developing partnerships with NGOs, the private sector, trade unions and community-based groups in expanding the delivery process. We are emphasizing the use of indigenous materials and technologies to lower the cost of building components and increase the housing stock.

My ministry has developed a five-year plan for the period 2001-2006 to facilitate housing construction, land development, the regularization of tenure of squatters and the upgrading of squatter sites. Our goal is to complete the construction of 30,000 new housing units within wholesome, healthy and integrated rural and urban communities in a five-year period. We propose to regularize the tenure of 2,000 squatters

annually and upgrade the sites on which they are located. It is expected that achieving this goal will cost an estimated $100 million annually. We will need international support to mobilize these resources of manpower, mind power, material and money.

The goal of cities without slums by the year 2015, whether in Port-of-Spain, our capital city, or in any other city of the developing world, cannot be achieved if we do not commit ourselves to assisting the least developed countries among us to achieve this noble yet difficult objective. We also need to revisit the international and national frameworks and institutions that hinder the enjoyment of the basic right of housing the world over. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to exhort all partners to reaffirm our commitment to the principles of the Agenda. I reaffirm the political will of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to this goal.

Trinidad and Tobago, a unitary State of two small islands in the Caribbean Sea, has demonstrated its capacity for creativity and cooperation. From discarded oil drums, we created a new musical instrument: the steel pan. From a past of colonialism and indentureship, we have forged a democratic country in which every creed and race finds an equal place. We are part of this struggle for better lives for all. We, too, would like to see poverty eradicated. We, too, would like to see a world without slums, one in which every man, woman and child, every creed, race, colour and class, finds an equal place. In return, we ask for the support of the international community and the international financial institutions only for those resources which we do not have and cannot mobilize.

We look forward to participating in the deliberations during the next few days as we seek creative and sustainable solutions to the global problems of inadequate housing, landlessness and poverty, and to ensure the full and equal participation of women.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jang-Seop Oh, Minister of Construction and Transportation of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Oh (Republic of Korea) (*spoke in Korean; English text furnished by the delegation*): It is a great honour for me to represent the Republic of Korea at this important meeting. As we enter the new millennium, the process of globalization is rapidly transforming our world, with widespread implications for our habitat. For this reason, this is an opportune time for us to appraise our achievements since the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) five years ago and to renew our commitment to enhancing the living environment.

Over recent decades, a worldwide trend towards urbanization has dramatically altered our socio-economic situation, so that half of the world's population now reside in cities. Furthermore, the rapid development of transportation and communication systems has enabled people to live in closer proximity and become better connected than ever before.

From an economic, social and cultural standpoint, cities are becoming an increasingly important space for humankind. At the same time, the rapid growth of the urban population has posed serious social and economic problems that threaten sustainable development and the guarantee of an adequate habitat. These problems include a lack of roads, water supplies and other basic infrastructure and services; disparities in wealth; environmental pollution; and urban crime.

While the urban problems are largely concentrated in the developing world, they are by no means confined to a specific area. For this reason, the effective implementation of the Agenda set forth at Habitat II has become a common task for the global community.

The Republic of Korea attaches great importance to the outcome of Habitat II. We are determined to implement the action plans proposed at the Conference in the most efficient manner. We have concentrated our efforts thus far on two objectives: adequate shelter for all, and sustainable human settlement development.

To this end, the central Government has been cooperating with major stakeholders, including local government and civic organizations. As a result, improvements have been made not only to the stability of the supply of shelter, land ownership, equality in use and other basic shelter services, but also to overall living conditions, such as shelter environment and home financing. In particular, since the late 1980s, efforts to expand the housing supply have resolved the nationwide housing shortage. The quality of shelter has also been enhanced, in particular by enlarging the living space and by modern facilities. As I mentioned earlier, the important role played by local government

and civic organizations in housing policy has been acknowledged and further strengthened.

However, the unprecedented financial crisis that we faced in late 1997 led to greater uncertainty for Korea's housing policies. In the wake of the crisis, housing construction dwindled and household income declined in both real and nominal terms. Faced with these new challenges, the Korean Government has introduced a number of bold measures to normalize the housing market.

The easing or deregulation of many land and housing-related ordinances has been a key part of the reform process. In addition, advanced real estate financing techniques have been introduced.

As part of the effort to enhance the social safety net in times of crisis, the National Basic Living Standard Guarantee Act was enacted to better assist the socially vulnerable and disadvantaged. Acknowledging the important role played by women in improving habitat, the Republic of Korea recently promulgated the Sexual Discrimination Prohibition Act and established the Ministry of Gender Equality.

In response to the growing interest among the Korean people in the quality of life, especially with respect to the environment, the central and local governments have been encouraged to reinforce their environment-related functions and to lend their support to non-profit organizations devoted to environmental issues. While we recognize these significant achievements, a number of challenges, including the continued concentration of the population in the capital region and the ensuing socio-economic problems, still need to be addressed.

Finally, Korea has been recognized as one of the world's most successful countries in terms of the provision of an adequate supply of housing in a relatively short period. In this regard, we are ready to share our experiences with developing countries and to assist them within our capacities.

I can assure you that the Republic of Korea remains fully committed to the implementation of the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda. The Republic of Korea also wholeheartedly supports the adoption of the declaration at this session and intends to participate actively in international efforts to tackle global shelter problems.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Cristodoulos Christodoulou, Minister of the Interior of Cyprus.

Mr. Christodoulou (Cyprus): Cyprus has aligned itself with the statement made by the Swedish presidency of the European Union, and I will thus limit my statement to some issues of particular concern to my Government.

Cyprus achieved significant socio-economic growth between independence, in 1960, and 1974. In 1974 the Turkish invasion caused an upheaval of unprecedented magnitude, and the repercussions continue to affect Cyprus today. Despite the substantial economic growth achieved since 1974 and the considerable improvement in living and working conditions, the enforced division of the insular territory undermines the future of Cyprus and its sustainable development.

There is no doubt that the major problem facing Cyprus stems from the prolonged severance of the centuries-old settlement system, the natural environment and the social fabric of our multi-cultural society. This unnatural and anachronistic deformation lies at the heart of most other major problems in Cyprus, such as the sudden expansion of urban centres in the Government-controlled areas due to the influx of refugees from the occupied part of the island, the immense pressure exerted on scarce natural resources, the deformation of demographic characteristics of the population of Cyprus due to ethnic cleansing and the illegal influx of settlers from Turkey, and the destruction of a very rich cultural heritage. I also mention in this respect the systematic change of official toponyms in the occupied areas that have survived through centuries, in an attempt to eradicate the historical, cultural and national heritage of the area, in violation of the resolutions of the United Nations conferences on the standardization of geographical names.

Settlements in Cyprus are being affected by most of the typical problems facing the rest of Europe. The dominance of private cars, traffic congestion in the central parts of urban centres and so forth have become commonplace problems of our major cities. At the same time, rural settlements are experiencing a variety of problems. Those along the coastline are under severe development pressure related to tourism, and their environmental integrity is threatened. In contrast, in the

hinterland there are numerous villages suffering from the results of economic stagnation, population losses, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient social facilities.

Regional disparities in the Government-controlled area of Cyprus are being dealt with through the implementation of special development programmes, policies and projects promoting regional development and the bridging of the gap between more and less developed areas of the island. The Government of Cyprus is aware of the situation affecting the occupied part of the island and the considerable development gap in comparison with Government-controlled areas. Our Government is taking into consideration the needs of the whole of Cyprus, irrespective of the results of occupation. Plans for the social and economic integration of Turkish Cypriots with the rest of the citizens of the Republic are constantly under review and being updated.

Our Government fully endorses the principle of subsidiarity, a concept that is central to the management of contemporary human settlements. A well-planned process for the transfer of decision-making competencies, as well as resources, from the central Government to local authorities is being implemented.

In the first 15 years after the Turkish invasion, national housing policy focused almost exclusively on addressing the urgent need for providing decent temporary accommodation for one third of the population of Cyprus, which was forcefully displaced from its ancestral homes and settlements. Cyprus has succeeded in this task, and today 58,000 refugee families live in acceptable housing conditions while they wait for their eventual return to beloved places in the occupied part of the island.

The very active private sector, which dominates the housing market in Cyprus, is supplemented by quasi-governmental agencies, specializing in housing financing and housing development. These agencies have gradually expanded their activities, and they have succeeded in adequately addressing the needs of low- to medium-income groups.

Since the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul, housing policies and programmes are under constant review, in order to integrate contemporary approaches and objectives. Recently, my Government has taken steps towards integrating the multiple but rather fragmented housing programmes into a comprehensive national housing strategy. During the 1990s public policy focused on the implementation of planning legislation and the promotion of sustainable development. One of the major objectives of the planning system relates to the improvement of the living and working conditions of the population as a whole.

The state of the environment in Cyprus still allows for new considerations and priorities to be incorporated into national social and economic development policies. The Government, in cooperation with local authorities and local communities, has incorporated environmental considerations and quality indices into most sectoral policies, such as the tourism and service sectors, the use on renewable energy sources, the agricultural policy and so forth.

The Government of the Republic of Cyprus, recognizing the central role of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements in promoting the Habitat Agenda, has decided to increase its voluntary contribution by 50 per cent. The Republic of Cyprus is expected to join the European Union in the near future, and our Government is working intensively in order to achieve this ambitious objective.

Cyprus should be reunited, and all its inhabitants — Greek and Turkish Cypriots, Armenians, Latins and Maronites — should be entitled to enjoy human rights and should be offered the opportunity to cooperate with each other, in order to build their own common, peaceful and prosperous future.

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Ismael Hurtado Soucre, Minister of Infrastructure of Venezuela.

Mr. Hurtado Soucre: (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, I wish to say that I am particularly pleased to be participating in this special session of the General Assembly to evaluate the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, which was adopted at Istanbul in 1996. I wish to affirm Venezuela's readiness to work earnestly and constructively in the work of this special session in order to help attain the lofty goals for which we are meeting here.

I want to take this opportunity to express appreciation for the work done by Ambassador Germán

García Durán, the representative of Colombia, who worked so effectively as Chairman of the preparatory committee in conducting the negotiations on the substantive aspects related to this session, thus making possible significant progress in the implementation of the commitments adopted at the Istanbul conference.

I would like to begin by referring to article 82 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which states:

> "Each and every person has a right to adequate, safe, comfortable and healthy housing, with essential basic services, including a habitat that humanizes family, neighbourly and community relations. The progressive satisfaction of this right is the shared responsibility of male and female citizens and the State in all of its spheres. The State will give priority to families, and it will ensure the means for them, especially those with limited resources, to have access to social policies and credit for the construction, acquisition or expansion of housing."

As a Venezuelan, I feel moved to confirm that there is complete consistency between my country's new Constitution and the objective of this special United Nations Assembly on human settlements. This undoubtedly promotes the review of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, which emerged in Istanbul in 1996. I am very pleased that the United Nations is gathering together in New York representatives of member countries to continue to study the complex problems of human habitat and to find solutions for the benefit of our peoples and nations.

The evolution of State policies in this respect has generated a qualitative and quantitative leap for present and future generations and has provided sufficient motivation to continue the march of development and human progress. In fact, there has been considerable variation in the way in which one views how to attend equitably to demands for a more dignified life. It has been accepted that providing adequate housing depends not only on State action but also on participation by the private sector, by non-governmental organizations and by communities themselves.

In Venezuela the constitutional article I earlier quoted has given rise to the design and implementation of an integral housing policy that reflects all concerns in this area, including the environment. In Venezuela today, we have implemented special programmes and policies to improve conditions in urban centres and rural areas, including indigenous areas. Our Constitution requires equal attention to that matter, respecting the primacy of the individual, of his or her needs and participation in attaining housing and a pleasant environment in general.

Those who attended Istanbul still remember that unforgettable session. I must confess that the sentiments expressed by some participants surprised and thrilled me to such an extent that our presence at this international forum includes in each of its proposals the clamour for a dignified space, one more economically viable, more environmentally sound and more just in social terms.

Moreover, Venezuela is very proud of the nearly concluded draft law of land ownership, which is moving our people towards a more dignified and more human life. They are increasingly supporting this Government policy, through which people feel they can participate directly in their own destiny.

Venezuelans are frequently heard to say: "We need support and friends — not intermediaries who will confiscate our words". Fortunately, the call of our people has been heeded by a Government that understands that the people deserve to be heard. The Ministry of Infrastructure of Venezuela bases its work on, among other things, providing an appropriate, clear and organized physical environment to the community for the development of its activities. Therefore, we will certainly be providing a better standard of living for our inhabitants and respecting their rights as citizens, their rights to access to land and housing.

It is my hope that in New York the purposes established in Istanbul will be enhanced and strengthened with the combined efforts made by the Member States of the United Nations in the last five years. Understanding the dignity of the human being guarantees the continuity of our efforts, so that the earth will continue to be the suitable habitat for humankind and that this same understanding will enhance the hope for a better world.

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Jacques Adiahenot, Minister of State, Minister of Habitat, Town Planning and Land Registration of Gabon.

Mr. Adiahenot (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): First of all, let me say what an honour and a pleasure it is for me to speak to you today, to address you on behalf of my country, Gabon, in this Assembly. I would also like to say how very much we appreciate the United Nations role in its ongoing quest for peace and the promotion of development.

Five years after Istanbul, this session presents an opportunity for us to review and appraise progress made, to identify obstacles and to contemplate, if necessary, new approaches.

We recall that the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements adopted the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda. These two instruments contain recommendations on the main themes that were discussed — namely, viable human settlements in an urbanizing world, and decent housing for everybody.

In keeping with these recommendations, my country has sought to conduct a policy of urban management that adheres strictly to this framework. Among the actions Gabon has undertaken since that time, I might refer to the fact that we have created, within the Ministry for Infrastructure, a general urban affairs department. We have established a national committee for Habitat. We have set up at the national level a unique association for the mayors of Gabon. We have strengthened partnership between the Government, local elected officials and civil society. We have also promoted community infrastructure pilot projects, funded by the World Bank. These projects have definite social advantages and are aimed at creating community jobs; promoting small and medium-sized businesses in the building industry; improving living conditions by building community infrastructures in poorly integrated districts; and enhancing administrative capacities for public works at the level of municipal technical services.

The most important action undertaken was the adoption of an urban development strategy funded by the World Bank: Gabon's urban policy declaration. Let me reiterate to the World Bank the sincere thanks of the President of Gabon and of my Government for its efforts.

Gabon's urban policy declaration is based on an unvarnished assessment of the situation, which has revealed uncontrolled urban sprawl in Gabon; a deteriorating public infrastructure and environment; inadequate transportation and urban services; and insufficient financial resources for urban development.

Gabon's new urban policy, which was adopted on 26 January 2001, highlights our Government's determination to improve the contribution made by cities to economic growth, to step up the fight against poverty and to strengthen good governance in our municipalities.

Likewise, the new urban policy has set the following priorities: promoting and developing an urban economy that can sustainably support economic and social growth; providing the urban sector with a framework and an environment conducive to the development of economic activities and the influx of private capital; controlling urban sprawl; improving the living conditions of urban populations, in particular in the poorer neighbourhoods; and building the administrative capacities of towns to prepare them to assume greater responsibility.

These goals reflect the recognition of the primary role played by cities, where more than two-thirds of our population lives. These goals cannot be realized without bold and innovative institutional and administrative reforms.

Following all of these in-depth reforms, our new urban policy will encourage global approaches and concrete actions in the field, leading to better urban administration and helping meet the needs of our citizens, taking into account current macroeconomic constraints as well as foreseeable changes in the global economy.

The implementation of such a policy requires significant and reliable funding. However, given our heavy debt burden, Gabon — like other developing countries — cannot cope with the situation alone. That is why we hope that our various partners will continue and strengthen their cooperation.

Before I conclude, I should like once again to thank the United Nations and to encourage it, through the Commission on Human Settlements, in its continuing quest to develop policies and programmes through which we can constantly improve the living conditions of our people.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hovik Abrahamyan, Minister of Territorial Administration of Armenia.

Mr. Abrahamyan (Armenia) (*spoke in Russian*): It is a great honour for me to address this special session of the General Assembly for this review and appraisal of the progress made in the implementation of the Habitat agenda.

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Armenia, I should like to express the hope that this historic meeting will represent a major milestone of productive cooperation. My country attaches great importance to the documents adopted in June 1996 at the international Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), and we have begun to elaborate and gradually to implement measures that seek to translate into reality the main principles for the sustainable development of human settlements.

My Government has adopted a programme for the gradual elaboration of overall plans for cities in my country, the implementation of which will promote the development of human settlements in the Republic and step up the process of urbanization of Armenia.

In recent years, following the destructive earthquakes that struck Armenia, certain geological processes have occurred that have exacerbated the situation. This is having a particular impact on transportation services. In addition, the Government has devised a programme to combat landslides.

One of our priorities is providing our people with housing. This has become particularly important following the Spitak earthquake and because of the huge flow of refugees pouring into Armenia as a result of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. Right now 45,000 families are homeless. New housing is being built, and new and alternative mechanisms are being used to provide people with houses, based on the principle of targeted financial assistance to our citizens.

Because of the economic recession, there has been a significant drop in the number of jobs, and unemployment is on the increase. In order to ease social problems in Armenia, a system of minimum social guarantees is in operation. We have also worked out a strategy for a strategic interim programme for poverty reduction. As a result of the continuing blockage of Armenia's transportation routes and its socio-economic difficulties, many problems facing refugees remain unresolved. More than 60 per cent of the citizens deported from Azerbaijan left behind their property, their homes, their apartments, their savings, and have thus far not received any compensation. The number of houses that Azerbaijanis have left behind in Armenia is about 30,000, but the number of houses left behind by Armenians in Azerbaijan is 92,000. Azerbaijanis have received from the Government of Armenia compensation totalling $110 million, whereas the overwhelming majority of those fleeing Azerbaijan — that is to say, our compatriots — have not received any monetary compensation from the Government of Azerbaijan.

The Government of Armenia has repeatedly raised this question of compensation for the property that the refugees had to abandon. Unfortunately, no progress has been made in this area. We need to resolve this issue in accordance with international agreements through bilateral talks and pacts. Because of the acute housing shortage, our Government has worked out a programme to provide deportees with housing, the cost of which has been $54 million. As a result, 13,000 refugee families have received housing.

I should like to take this opportunity to touch on the crucial problem of Lake Sevan, the largest freshwater basin in the Caucasus, which has vital importance for my country. The ecological situation of Lake Sevan should become the focus of attention and concern at both the national and international levels. This problem should be given due attention, because the eventual loss of Lake Sevan could lead to an unprecedented ecological disaster.

In recent years, international cooperation in urban planning and the development of human settlements has been increasing in importance and will provide greater opportunities for close cooperation between cities and human settlements.

In its implementation of these programmes, my Government has been cooperating closely with international organizations, in particular with the Black Sea Economic Cooperation organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United States Agency for International Development, the World Bank, the Lindsay fund, the European Union's programme of Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and the United Nations Development Programme, and on the bilateral level with the Governments of the United States, Germany, Japan, India, Greece, Cyprus, Korea and several other countries.

I wish in conclusion to reiterate my hope that this special session will encourage sustainable urban planning in a future marked by close cooperation.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Kimmo Sasi, Minister of Foreign Trade of Finland.

Mr. Sasi (Finland): My delegation fully supports the statement made earlier by the Minister for Housing of Sweden, who spoke on behalf of the European Union. I would, however, like to draw attention to some issues of special interest to Finland on this important occasion regarding the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

This review is taking place parallel with the Millennium Assembly. In the Millennium Declaration our heads of State or Government resolved to achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020, as proposed in the Cities without Slums initiative. We need to keep that commitment in mind during the present review of the Habitat Agenda.

The challenges set forth in the Habitat Agenda are of immense importance in today's world. We are witnesses to rapidly increasing urbanization, a phenomenon that has moulded our living environment like no other man-made development in the history of mankind. Despite enormous investment in urban development, housing conditions in many areas of the world are insufficient, and the direction in which conditions are developing is not necessarily positive. The reason is that poor economic development and rapid population growth are widespread in today's world.

On the other hand, many cities with equal resource bases have turned out very differently owing to varying development policies. To a larger extent, we should be evaluating the positive and negative features of various policies and approaches, and learning from and disseminating the resulting information. The thematic committees at this special session support such goals. I also believe that existing international cooperation and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) can play an important role in this field.

In line with the spirit of the Habitat Agenda, Finland promoted the right to adequate housing in a 1995 amendment to its constitution. In that legislation, the right to housing is not guaranteed, apart from specific exceptions, as a justifiable right. However, what is underlined is the supportive role of public authorities. Additionally, local authorities must take steps to improve housing conditions that particularly benefit the homeless and those whose housing conditions are inadequate.

A key problem worldwide is the division of cities into high-income and low-income areas, which has led to great social and financial problems. Finland has, as a central issue in housing policy, made concerted efforts to ensure a social mix of inhabitants in all residential areas. Various measures have been applied to achieve this, for example locating social and other housing in the same areas.

Local authorities are central to success in meeting many of the challenges set by the Habitat Agenda. In Finland, municipalities have played a key role. With decentralization, individuals have the opportunity to take part in the development of their communities. This takes place, for example, through democratic participation in municipal decision-making. Decentralization also gives local authorities a high level of financial independence. That independence allows municipalities to act for themselves.

In Istanbul, five years ago, Finland underlined the important linkages between human settlements development and global environmental issues, especially climate change. The significance of regional and community structures in diminishing emissions of greenhouse gases has been acknowledged. Finland is working to curb urban sprawl by integrating new development within existing city structures, and by promoting an environmentally friendly transportation system. We are also working hard to decrease air pollution and increase the efficiency of our energy production systems. For example, during the last two decades, nitrogen and sulphur dioxide emissions have been reduced by 70 per cent in Helsinki, but energy production has increased steadily. Highly developed technology has brought the efficiency of our combined heat and energy production to more than 90 per cent. That technology is used for both district heating and cooling. Finland's experience shows that air quality can be improved without negative effects on production.

We believe that our deliberations on the Habitat Agenda will be an excellent forum for focusing on and developing the future of our cities and human

settlements. We look forward to this special session as an excellent opportunity to give political support to the continued implementation of the Habitat Agenda. We hope that the participants in this special session will leave New York with a feeling of confidence that they can influence the outcome of development, and with a vision of how to do so.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ricardo Gorosito, Vice-Minister of Housing, Environment and Land Management of Uruguay.

Mr. Gorosito (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish first of all to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this special session, and to recall the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held at Istanbul in 1996, at which I was unanimously elected Rapporteur by the countries represented at the Conference.

During the 1990s, Uruguay, like other countries in South America, opened up to the demands of a globalizing world. During that period we began a series of seemingly unavoidable economic adjustments. At the same time, and in anticipation of the predictably negative impact of those changes on Uruguayan society, social policies were developed to mitigate the inevitable dislocations. Within that framework, following the Habitat II summit, Uruguay brought its public policies in the areas of housing, land-use planning and the environment into line with the integrating concept of Habitat.

Our national Government adopted a number of innovative strategies to deal with the consequences of uncoordinated actions in the field of human settlements, by strengthening regional forums; diversifying lines of access to housing, with a special emphasis on channelling direct public subsidies to the most disadvantaged sectors; launching major projects for the protection and preservation of the environment; and promoting urban master plans in coordination with local governments.

In terms of its regional policies, Uruguay came out solidly in support of the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) process. To that end, the Government, in coordination with local administrations and with technical cooperation from France and South Africa, developed strategic plans to promote our country's physical integration into the region.

Mr. Andino Salazar (El Salvador), Vice-President, took the Chair.

My delegation stresses the relevance of the Regional Plan of Action on Human Settlements and of the support it has received, which we acknowledge as an essential strategic platform. We also stress the importance of implementing the recommendations approved in the Declaration of Santiago last October, as well as the considerations expressed at the Meeting of Ministers and High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean.

At the subregional level, mention should be made of the South-Western Uruguay Strategic Plan for the construction of the bi-national bridge over the River Plate linking Argentina and Uruguay. In the extreme east of the road axis, urban planning in the cities of the region bordering Brazil is further testimony to the drive towards integration. The central region of our country, historically lagging in development, is currently the beneficiary of a regional development and land-use planning project.

Activities in the public sector have been directed during this period mainly towards older age groups with limited resources and at addressing the growing problem of unplanned settlements. To that end, a low-cost housing programme has been launched for the benefit of non-working low-income groups. Under this programme, beneficiaries receive lifetime benefits of excellent quality housing, located preferably in central and intermediate areas of cities. In order to ensure the sustainability of the system, dwellings are administered and maintained by the State.

The State is also seeking to counter the phenomenon of unplanned and makeshift settlements in various ways, inter alia, by making available to potential squatters large numbers of lots with infrastructure services, a supply of materials and technical assistance through non-governmental organizations, which will increase the supply of legally available urban land; by repopulating consolidated areas of cities that were being depopulated, which will promote, inter alia, the repopulating of an urban area with considerable installed capacity and patrimonial value, as in the case of the historic neighbourhoods of Montevideo; and by creating a guarantee fund for leases that will facilitate the rental of under-occupied housing stock, in the first instance, to young people.

Advances in the protection of natural areas, biodiversity and sustainable development have been made in the wide coastal regions of the River Plate, the Atlantic Ocean and maritime lagoons.

The main elements of the commitments undertaken in the national plan for Habitat II have been undertaken by the national Government and most local administrations. However, these social policy actions have failed to reverse the trend towards the deterioration of many urban areas as a consequence of unemployment, the restructuring of traditional economic sectors and marginalization.

In conclusion, and consistent with the fundamental values of social democracy, of which Uruguay has been an example and a spokesperson in the concert of nations, our Government reiterates its firm commitment to the future revitalization of the Habitat Agenda as an instrument for channelling the civilizing mission of the first few decades of this century towards the restoration of equity and justice, so that when we speak of humanity as a family, it is not merely a figure of speech.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Salvador Gomila, Vice-President of the National Institute of Housing of the Republic of Cuba.

Mr. Gomila (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Since Istanbul, the evolution of global indicators on human settlements and housing has not been at all encouraging for the so-called third world countries, as we can from reports for this event, including the report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) herself. The dramatic realities go far beyond what any statistic can express.

The rapid process of urbanization and population growth experienced by our world in recent decades has given rise to the enormous figure of 6 billion inhabitants. There has, however, been no corresponding development of agreements and promises of better solutions to the critical problems of housing shortages and environmental protection, among others, which are graver today than ever.

In the Latin America and the Caribbean region, the most urbanized in the world, these processes have been characterized by insufficient social investment and an increase in urban segregation, marginality, insecurity of land rights, violence, limited access to social services and a deterioration of the environment. All of this has been aggravated by the frequent occurrence of natural disasters. The reality of 2001 is no better for our region than that of 1996, when we met in Istanbul.

The principles and commitments undertaken by Governments in Habitat II represent a glimmer of hope for the millions of human beings living in conditions of poverty and deteriorating environments and lacking proper and healthy housing.

The decline in international cooperation assistance from the most developed countries and the clear trend towards eliminating or reversing some of the basic principles and commitments formulated five years ago in Istanbul jeopardize these achievements. Governments must therefore be unswerving in their efforts to preserve the provisions of the Habitat Agenda and to advance resolutely towards their practical implementation.

Our country, in the midst of considerable resource restraints and the tightening of the economic, trade and financial blockade that has been maintained for over 40 years, is working to make the right to housing effective and to ensure the implementation of the principles, commitments and plan of action arising from the Habitat Agenda.

Our population has guaranteed access to the basic services of education, health care, culture, sports and more for all citizens. We have supplied drinking water through aqueducts to all rural settlements and have electrified 96 per cent of the country's housing. There are financial and loan facilities to give the population access to housing being built through state channels, with subsidies amounting to over 50 per cent of cost, free of property tax and with full ownership security. More than 85 per cent of families own their own homes.

Given the special significance and importance of this special session, we reiterate here our desire for integration and cooperation in the field of housing and human settlements with all countries, in particular those of Latin America and the Caribbean, through the Meeting of Ministers and High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector, for the implementation and consolidation of the Regional Plan of Action.

Let us join our will and efforts to stem the growth of poverty in order to ensure a better future for our peoples that is more humane, with real fairness and equal opportunity for all nations and their populations, regardless of size or economic or military potential. Let us once again trust in man, in his wisdom, in his common sense, in his capacity to act as a human being in order to make reason and justice the basis, in general terms, for relations among peoples, to eliminate the marginality, poverty and other calamities that, today more than ever, afflict human kind.

The Acting President *(spoke in Spanish)*: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ali Hamad Al-Shamsi, Under-Secretary, Ministry of Public Works and Housing of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour, on behalf of the State of the United Arab Emirates, to extend my congratulations to the President and the members of the Bureau on their election at this special session of the General Assembly. I wish you all every success.

Despite many initiatives and efforts made by Governments and partners to implement the recommendations of the Habitat Agenda, reports and recent international statistics affirm that over 1 billion of the world's people continue to live without adequate housing and lack the most basic health and social services. That fact — in addition to increasing poverty, civil and regional conflicts and interference in the internal affairs of States — are among the obstacles preventing many countries, and in particular developing countries, from realizing their development plans and programmes. Individual Governments and the international community must therefore make greater efforts and take further measures to achieve peace, security, stability and development.

Under the leadership of His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, the United Arab Emirates has made human settlements one of its most important priorities. My country has implemented the principle of decentralization in its management structures. We have also adopted development policies based on the free market economy, enabling strategies, and the principle of partnership between federal and local government, the private sector and all other partners. We have done this with a view to developing the housing sector and human settlement so as to make it possible to meet housing needs and provide stability and a dignified life for our citizens.

Through those policies, the United Arab Emirates has been able to make progress in the area of housing and human settlements by building and developing new and modern villages and cities in which human beings enjoy high levels of municipal services. Those services include the provision of adequate housing equipped with basic services and utilities, as well as health, social and educational services.

The United Arab Emirates has also focused its attention on disseminating best practices, which are the main instruments in monitoring and evaluating progress in the implementation of national plans, and on creating awareness of issues of population and human settlements. Since 1995, the Government of Dubai has awarded the Dubai international prize for best practices in the improvement of housing conditions. This prize, worth $400,000, is awarded every two years for the best 10 practices.

The United Arab Emirates has given particular attention to this special session and values the efforts made in the preparations for it. The United Arab Emirates considers the draft declaration on cities and other human settlements that will be adopted by the special session to be an important document for achieving the aspirations of the world's peoples. We would therefore like to express our support for the objectives contained in the declaration, while at the same time affirming the urgent importance of bearing in mind the distinct cultural, social and philosophical heritage of all peoples and their political systems.

As we examine the progress made in sustainable development, human settlements and the provision of adequate housing for all, there are still many regional and international conflicts and cases of occupation in the world — in particular in our Arab region and in the Gulf. Iran's occupation since 1971 of the Emirate islands of Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunb, and its continuing attempts to change the demographic and historical character of our three islands, represents a clear violation of our sovereignty and of the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law. From this rostrum we call upon the international community to urge the Islamic Republic of Iran to respond to the many repeated peaceful initiatives and appeals made by the United Arab Emirates to end its occupation of our three islands through serious

bilateral negotiations or by bringing the case before the International Court of Justice.

Israel's continuing violations and its brutal and systematic daily crimes against the Palestinian people — including the destruction of houses and farms, the confiscation of land, the expansion of illegal settlements and the eviction of Palestinians to make them homeless — are contrary to the principles and objectives of this special session. We therefore call upon the members of the international community, and in particular the leading countries of the Security Council, to assume their legal and historical responsibilities and to bring political pressure to bear upon the Israeli Government to immediately stop its aggression and criminal acts against the Palestinian people, acts that are direct violations of international humanitarian law. They should also bring pressure to bear upon Israel so that it implements the agreements it has concluded with the Palestinian side and ends its occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories — including the Holy City of Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan — and completes its withdrawal from all Lebanese territory.

We would once again like to reaffirm our full support for the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of their own independent State — just like any other people — with Holy Jerusalem as its capital. The achievement of just and comprehensive peace in the region requires the implementation of the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy.

Finally, we hope that this special session will achieve its desired objectives and that it will contribute to the happiness and prosperity of humanity.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gian Nicola Filippi Balestra, Chairman of the delegation of San Marino.

Mr. Balestra (San Marino): Allow me to congratulate the President and thank him for organizing this special session of the General Assembly. The massive attendance of the highest representatives of Member States confirms and underlines the attention that our Governments pay to the global problem of human settlements.

The Government of San Marino is particularly aware of the importance of this special session on urbanization and housing. We know that the implementation of the Habitat Agenda depends not only on a global and thorough knowledge of the problems, but also on an immediate and efficient response from our Governments. These two relevant and necessary steps must be interlinked and coordinated.

Climate changes have left some land unproductive and have provoked the exodus of rural populations towards the cities. This rapid increase in the urban populations has made living conditions in the cities unbearable. Many overpopulated cities have no communications networks, no water-pipe systems, no schools, no health-care centres and no other forms of infrastructure. The increase of industrial production, on one hand, has created new job opportunities, but, on the other hand, it has not helped the natural environment or the living conditions of some urban centres. All this accounts for environmental damage of huge proportions, which we are all called to respond to quickly and efficiently. But we are caught in a vicious cycle, which must be tackled in all its aspects in order for it to be fully broken.

San Marino hopes that the international community will be able to create new incentives to ensure the permanence of rural populations on the land and to stimulate the process of counter-exodus: from the city to the countryside.

We will have to reconsider agriculture. In the countries where this is possible, we will need to develop policies that sustain the process of converting conventional agriculture into biological and integrated agriculture.

The environmental question has particular relevance at the global level. It is also very important today in San Marino.

The history of human settlements in the Republic of San Marino, notwithstanding its 60 square kilometres of territory, in substance is not very different from that of other countries. After the Second World War, the territory underwent a fast and radical transformation. Like other territories, San Marino had to face the exodus from the countryside, but, lacking big urban centres, it had to cope with an agglomeration process that caused the creation of small centres, each characterized by different functions. Recent building development turned the various villages into a large agglomeration, causing them to lose their original

character, but that agglomeration did not become a new urban form.

Thanks to its limited population and recent economic well-being, the Republic of San Marino does not have to face the problem of housing at the moment. To prevent this problem and to deal with the present situation, we adopted some political and legal measures. For instance, we analysed the new need for new homes; we established a policy to make home purchasing more accessible; we adopted measures to facilitate and promote the offer of homes for rent; we promptly answered the need for temporary homes for the disadvantaged social classes; and we created public green areas, infrastructures, parking and public spaces.

San Marino has to tackle another serious problem: safeguarding its territory, taking into consideration that the excessive increase of buildings in already densely populated and congested areas could compromise the environmental balance and entail serious difficulties. It is therefore imperative to apply balanced town planning in the future, focusing on sustainable development and on analysis of the impact on the natural environment.

The Republic of San Marino is convinced that efficient implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements can be achieved only through the real conviction that both the problem and its solution are a global concern. Our action must be well defined and must envision the restructuring of our social and economic systems. Most of all, it requires a new policy of international cooperation, with the common good of the planet as its main goal, instead of the particular interests of a few countries.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I call on His Excellency Mr. Hiroo Kinoshita, Special Adviser to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport and Chairman of the delegation of Japan.

Mr. Kinoshita (Japan) (*spoke in Japanese; interpretation provided by the delegation*): First of all, I would like to express my profound gratitude to all those involved in the preparation of this important session. It is an honour for me to represent the Japanese Government at this significant event.

Five years have passed since we met in Istanbul to reaffirm the spirit of the Vancouver meeting of 1976. However, we are facing difficult problems in human settlements, such as rapid urbanization, environmental issues and a widening gap between the rich and the poor. Now, so that we may bring humankind to prosperity in the new century that has just begun, it is very timely for us to send powerful messages of action for the alleviation of human settlement problems, which is essential for peace and the development of humankind.

Based on a spirit of partnership, in Japan we have worked aggressively towards the concrete realization of the Habitat Agenda through public involvement. Let me introduce the main activities.

First, the issues of human settlements are extremely broad and varied, and they include economic, social and cultural factors. So it is necessary to plan national land policies in order to solve the problems. In Japan, in order to improve the human settlement conditions, national land policies are aimed at brightening the lives of individuals, ensuring safety and security, the creation of a beautiful and favourable environment and the formation of diversified regions and localities.

Secondly, as half the Japanese population lives in the country's three metropolitan areas, we make efforts to promote twenty-first-century urban renaissance projects that target the revival of cities from the standpoint of environment, disaster prevention and globalization, in order to enrich the lives of urban residents.

Thirdly, based on the eighth five-year housing construction plan, which was established by the Japanese Government in March 2001, we will work mainly on such basic tasks as the construction of good-quality housing stock that meets the diverse needs of the nation and the construction of a vibrant housing environment that supports an ageing society with fewer children.

As for land policies, we will pursue the realization of the effective use of land by promoting such policies as the development of underutilized or unused land in city centres.

Fourthly, water problems, including water shortages, the spread of water pollution and the large-scale floods, are emerging all over the world and are resulting in such things as food shortages and the spread of epidemic diseases. This may lead to a serious

situation in the near future as the increase in population and rapid urbanization progress.

The Third World Water Forum will be held in the Kyoto area in the year 2003 to discuss water problems. I would like to call for the active participation of all present , from all over the world, in that forum.

Fifthly, I would like to talk about disaster prevention, for which Japan strongly appealed in Habitat II, based on the invaluable lessons learned from the great earthquakes.

The World Conference on Natural Disasters 2001 was held in February, in Awaji, located in the Hyogo prefecture, which experienced the great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake. The Conference confirmed that it was necessary to establish strategic guidelines for restoration, and an agreement was reached to enhance the global disaster prevention framework in order to implement global disaster prevention strategies. Let us promote international cooperation and partnership in the area of disaster prevention in the future and work towards the realization of that agreement.

Six years ago, when Japan experienced the great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, we received warm support from all over the world. I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation for that support.

Finally, I would like to note the Japanese Government's international involvement towards realizing the Habitat Agenda. The Japanese Government has supported projects to improve living conditions in low-income areas by establishing the Trust Fund for Human Security at the United Nations.

Approaches in which residents themselves actively participate in improving living standards are very effective for the development of poverty areas. We give consideration to these participatory approaches involving regional residents when we cooperate with poverty reduction projects. Such projects include job training, creating employment opportunities and making basic social services available. As part of its effort, the Japanese Government has established funds for poverty reduction in the framework of the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, through which grant assistance is provided.

Furthermore, partnerships between various parties are important in implementing the Habitat Agenda. The Japanese Government will continue to assist non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in developing countries and provide them with financial assistance, such as NGO project subsidies and grant assistance for grass-roots projects, in order to ensure cooperation directed at economic and social development.

The Japanese Government welcomed the opening of the Habitat Asia and Pacific regional office in Fukuoka in 1997, and cooperates in resolving settlement issues in the region. We cooperate through the Japan-Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Cooperation Fund, with the aim of implementing the Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment. That initiative was adopted at the fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, which was hosted by the Government of Japan and organized by ESCAP. We have also actively supported the initiative by establishing a national support framework.

In the twenty-first century, as we are becoming increasingly aware of environmental issues and the finite nature of the earth's resources, all nations must cooperate to bring about a flourishing and bountiful world whose inhabitants can enjoy economic, as well as spiritual, well-being. I would like to conclude by assuring the Assembly that the Japanese Government is committed to strengthening its efforts to play a role in international society, as well as to implementing its domestic human settlement policies.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gediminas Šerkšnys, Chairman of the delegation of Lithuania.

Mr. Šerkšnys (Lithuania): I should like to thank the President, on behalf of the Lithuanian delegation, for organizing this special session of the General Assembly in order to review and appraise the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). Sharing experiences and best practices with other countries gives us new impetus to achieve Habitat II goals.

While aligning ourselves fully with the statement made by the European Union, I would also like to share with the Assembly our national experiences with regard to this issue. Lithuania associates itself with the principles of the draft declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium. However, I would like to stress not only that our commitments should be clear and carry the message that our goal is

to improve living conditions for the poor, but also that concrete actions must be taken.

Implementing the outcome of the Habitat II Conference has been a constant goal of the Lithuanian Government. Both the ongoing process of the country's accession to the European Union and its aspirations to increase universal well-being are being pursued through macroeconomic activity, which creates preconditions for the implementation of the outcome of Habitat II.

Common European processes are having a permanent influence on Lithuania. The structure of Lithuania's gross domestic product is becoming similar to that of the Western European countries. The private sector creates over 70 per cent of the gross domestic product of Lithuania. Our economic transformation has reached its final stage, and trends in economic growth are being observed. The quality of life is improving, and long-term investment in the housing sector is increasing.

A network of urban areas has already developed in Lithuania and shows a balanced settlement structure, with different functions distributed among urban centres. Even at lower levels, the settlement structure appears to be balanced. Such a situation creates favourable conditions for the integration of urban and rural areas, as well as their development under new social and economic conditions.

Although Lithuania's transition to the market economy left its mark on housing construction, new and better quality materials that help to reduce energy consumption have begun to be used. Instead of 336 dwellings per 1,000 inhabitants, with 20 square metres per person — the situation in 1995 — there are now 356 housing units per 1,000 inhabitants, with an average of 21.5 square metres per person, and 97 per cent of the units are private. Investment in new housing construction represents about 9.2 per cent of total investments; however, the percentage set aside for social housing should be increased. Lithuanian municipalities are constantly being urged to assume greater responsibility for social housing construction.

The number of newly built single-family houses has increased noticeably, and the overall quality of buildings has improved. Since a considerable number of houses, especially those in the cities, are large panel houses with poor energy efficiency, investment in renovating and modernizing them is constantly increasing. In order to fulfil the commitment of the State-supported housing programme and to facilitate conditions for the acquisition of dwellings through purchase, construction or renovation, the Lithuanian Government took a number of measures under its strategic housing policy. About 20 laws, and twice as many by-laws and regulations, relating to housing and human settlements have been enforced in Lithuania during the past 5 years. The Civil Code, which entered into force in Lithuania this year, was an important legal act for improving residential property management. The formation of homeowners' associations in privatized, multifamily houses is being promoted, and legislation relating to the activities of homeowners' associations is constantly being improved. A new law on residential building construction associations is currently being drafted.

The Lithuanian Government has drawn up a new policy on the acquisition of residential property, in which emphasis is placed on existing problems and measures for the acquisition, reconstruction and rental of municipal dwellings. By enlarging budget assignments for loan subsidies, State support has been strengthened for young families — those whose members are under the age of 35 — for housing acquisition.

The Housing Loan Insurance Company began its activities last year. The company provides loan insurance of as well as guarantees to banks. It has made it possible for people to receive housing loans with a down payment of only 5 per cent.

After the reform of the cadastral and real estate register system and the creation of a new mortgage infrastructure, the supply of mortgage loans increased significantly. The Energy Efficiency in Housing pilot project was successfully finalized with funding from the World Bank and implemented by the Housing and Urban Development Foundation. The Foundation, which was established in 1996, provides loans for homeowners' associations and schools. Preparations were being made for negotiations with the World Bank for an additional loan for housing renovation needs in Lithuania.

We are pleased to be able to express our satisfaction with the fruitful cooperation with the Economic Commission for Europe, as well as the United Nations Development Programme office in Vilnius. The Country Profile on Housing in Lithuania,

which was prepared in cooperation with an international team of experts, was published in the English and Lithuanian languages. It was presented both to governmental institutions and to the Society for the Discussion of Housing Improvement in Lithuania. The strategy addresses the main problems of housing renovation, suggests ways to implement energy efficiency measures and makes other practical recommendations. Cooperation with corresponding ministries from the Netherlands, Poland, Germany, Sweden and our Baltic neighbours influenced a number of challenging ideas related to implementing the provisions of the Habitat II documents.

We consider the spirit of Habitat II to be alive and well. It inspires us to undertake further steps for the implementation of the Habitat outcome.

The Acting President *(spoke in Spanish)*: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Bernd Niehaus, Chairman of the delegation of Costa Rica.

Mr. Niehaus (Costa Rica) *(spoke in Spanish)*: The elimination of poverty, the sustainable development of human settlements and the provision of decent housing for everyone are fundamental duties both of the international community as a whole and of each and every one of our Governments. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights reminds us, in article 25, paragraph 1, that

> "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing ...".

As a result, a profoundly humanistic approach should be taken to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and of the draft declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium, which we will shortly be adopting. Their goal, based on the inherent dignity of each individual, is to promote and ensure the full enjoyment of fundamental rights.

Cities are one of the highest achievements of civilization. They bring together all the energies and efforts, arts and knowledge of humankind. They offer an ideal setting for creative and constructive interaction among people. Only in cities is it possible to find the immense range of opportunities and options needed for the full development of human beings on the intellectual, emotional and spiritual levels.

Regrettably, cities also feature the most abject living conditions. Poverty, hunger, disease, insecurity, unemployment, discrimination, the lack of basic services and the effects of conflicts and natural disasters cast their menacing shadows over our cities. How many children live in the street? How many old people die forgotten? How many families suffer from hunger? Cities can be profoundly dehumanizing. It is very easy to be blinded by their bright lights and to not want to see the suffering of their inhabitants.

Poverty is the main obstacle to the sustainable development of human settlements. If we do not have the necessary economic resources, it is impossible to improve the living conditions of our citizens. The challenge of poverty is multifaceted. In order to tackle it, we must face and meet the manifold needs for food, health care, housing, drinking water, education, job training, employment, fair wages, productivity, competitiveness and access to opportunities. We must also combat structural obstacles that intensify the problem of poverty or prevent us from overcoming it. These obstacles include financial imbalances, lack of capital for productive and social investment, restricted access to international markets and natural disasters that have devastating effects on the poorest and most vulnerable economies.

At the same time we must tackle the danger of unbalanced growth, which darkens the future with the spectre of a greater gulf between the poorest and the richest. The lack of equity in access to opportunity intensifies social conflict, reduces governability and engenders social violence. For this reason, it is essential for us to take effective measures to create fairer and more equitable societies. In this regard, the design and construction of the infrastructure of urban centres should support economic development by stimulating productive activities and the generation of employment.

In recent years we have witnessed repeated natural disasters in the Central American region. Although those disasters have arisen from natural events such as hurricanes, earthquakes and torrential rains, their unfortunate effects have been accentuated by deficiencies in urban development and growth. The human, economic, political and social cost of tackling environmental emergencies is immense. For this reason, urban design must reduce the vulnerability of settlements to such disasters. We must adopt building techniques that minimize the effects of earth

movements and prohibit building in areas prone to flooding or avalanches. An environmental policy that will guarantee sustainable land management, prevent deforestation and erosion, and ensure proper water management is the best protection against natural disasters.

The sustainable development of urban centres requires the elaboration of development plans that take into account the available natural resources, the present and future needs of the community, waste and pollution management, access to basic services and transportation and environmental impact assessments. These technical aspects must go hand in hand with a continuous process of democratic and transparent consultation with the communities concerned, so as to respond properly to their wishes and expectations.

Today, I am glad to be able to say that Costa Rica has an active grass-roots programme for building housing that is designed to guarantee the fundamental right of all Costa Ricans to decent housing. My country's social programmes seek to give all families a safe home, full access to basic water, electric and waste-disposal services, and fair access to high-quality health care and education. We are convinced that only in this way — through a firm political commitment — will it be possible to give everyone the decent living conditions that they deserve.

The Acting President *(spoke in Spanish)*: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Marc Nteturuye, Chairman of the delegation of Burundi.

Mr. Nteturuye (Burundi) *(spoke in French)*: Allow me first of all to address, on behalf of my delegation and myself, my sincere congratulations to the President of this twenty-fifth special session and to the other members of the Bureau, in whom this Assembly has placed its full trust. I feel sure that with their wisdom and rich experience, this significant session will be crowned with real success. I assure them of the support of my delegation for the success of our work.

I would also like to pay a vigorous tribute to the Secretary-General and to the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements for the fine preparations for this session and for the quality and richness of the documents that have been produced. The strategies and most relevant recommendations that have been formulated during the preparatory sessions for this special session have shown to humanity as a whole the importance of human settlements for economic and social development during this new millennium.

With a population of roughly 7 million, Burundi faces both a high population density — more than 250 inhabitants per square kilometre — and a population growth rate that is among the highest on our continent. The population is essentially rural; the level of urbanization in Burundi is only 7 per cent. This is why the Government of Burundi instituted a voluntary policy aimed at developing secondary urban centres in order to alleviate demographic pressure on the scarce agricultural lands.

Burundi adopted this policy in order to avert the harmful effects that could result in the near future, on the one hand, from the exodus of rural populations lacking land to cultivate, and, on the other hand, from the need to provide for the massive return of refugees once the peace agreement, signed on 28 August 2000, is effectively implemented.

In order to do so, it is necessary to equip the country's secondary urban centres with the tools for urban planning and management, to establish shared facilities and basic infrastructure through the high-intensity work programme and to promote non-agricultural jobs through cottage industries and other income-generating activities.

The Government of Burundi considers housing a fundamental human right equal to those of food and health. Before the crisis that my country has been undergoing since 1993, the Government, with the help of the people themselves and the assistance of bilateral and multilateral cooperation, had undertaken a vast programme for the improvement and production of housing, both in the urban centres and in the countryside. Such remarkable progress was made that if the same level of performance had been maintained, the availability of decent housing would have exceeded the rate of 80 per cent by the end of the year 2000. Unfortunately, the crisis strongly affected economic and social development. Not only did it take tens of thousands of lives and result in several hundred thousand refugees and internally displaced persons, but it also caused the destruction of a great deal of housing. This sad situation has shown the extent to which housing is a fundamental human right, as important as life itself.

To deal with this situation that has deeply affected human settlements, and in application of

recommendations made at various preparatory meetings for the Istanbul Conference, the Government of Burundi has drawn up a national programme that focuses mainly on the following areas of action: reconstruction of the social fabric torn apart by the socio-political crisis; the return and social reintegration of displaced and repatriated persons; the reconstruction of socio-economic infrastructures and housing destroyed by the war; the implementation of a policy for balanced development in urban centres; and the promotion of housing, related services and the protection of the environment.

However, this programme can be fully implemented only in an environment of peace and security. This is why the Government, with the support of the international community, initiated and piloted a peace process, through the inter-Burundi negotiations, in order to achieve reconciliation among the sons and daughters of our country. Global and inclusive, and through the mediation of Nelson Mandela, these negotiations led to a political accord on 28 August 2000; however, peace will come only when war is over and that accord can be implemented.

With this agreement, the Government is convinced that its Habitat plan of action will be able to be well implemented. The recent round table of donors, which met in Paris in December 2000, gave us great hope. That conference was a success. Almost $440 million was pledged to our country to support the Government in its programme of consolidation of peace and national reconstruction.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate, on behalf of my Government, our sincere gratitude to friendly countries and international organizations for the support and sympathy they have shown us. My Government hopes that the aid promised will be made available as soon as possible.

Certainly, the assistance pledged in Paris is significant; but it is still not enough in view of the huge needs for reconstruction. This is why we are launching another appeal to the international community to redouble its efforts to come to the assistance of our Government and people in the implementation of our national plan of action. The Government of the Republic of Burundi is hopeful and optimistic regarding the generosity and solidarity of the international community.

Before concluding, I wish to affirm once more, on behalf of my Government, the need to revitalize and strengthen the capacity of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, which must continue to play a leading role in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

The Acting President *(spoke in Spanish)*: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ángel Edmundo Orellana Mercado, Chairman of the delegation of Honduras.

Mr. Orellana Mercado (Honduras) *(spoke in Spanish)*: The Honduran delegation is honoured to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election as President of this special session, and we are grateful for the statement made by the Secretary-General at the opening of the session.

Internal migration from rural to urban areas is a principal cause of the current problem of human settlements. It is a historical phenomenon common to all peoples. But today, when globalization has combined with the traditional factors that have driven that phenomenon, adding elements that make it a problem affecting all peoples equally, its manifestations are no longer merely the subject of government policies; rather, it has acquired the status of a fundamental issue in relations among countries.

The pressure exerted on large cities by migration from rural areas and the establishment of industries that pollute the environment give rise to major dysfunctions in the economies of developing countries, and particularly in the policies and programmes designed to provide for human settlements.

Every day our countries face, with increasing concern, crises stemming from the inadequacy of our basic services, such as electricity, drinking water, good health and so forth. They make significant efforts to cope with the destructive effects of disorderly population movements and industrial activities, particularly environmental pollution, which generates a large part of our most serious problems.

But recently a new factor has been added to the worsening of this problem: nature. Disasters of apocalyptic dimensions have wreaked havoc on entire nations, either destroying their productive capacity or dealing it a severe blow.

Our country, Honduras, has been among these victims. The Government whose term is ending began

its activities by tackling the disastrous consequences of Hurricane Mitch; and throughout its term of office, its key priority has been to bolster the nation physically and morally, an endeavour in which it has received the unconditional solidarity of civil society.

Our problems were multiplied in an instant, particularly those of human settlements. Entire towns disappeared when the blind forces of nature were unleashed; and many sectors in rural and urban areas were razed or severely affected, particularly the most vulnerable. Protecting the health of those affected, providing shelter to those who had been left at the mercy of the elements and creating the necessary conditions to reactivate the economy were factors that dictated the State's activities.

Our housing problem is still one of the key ones; but, notwithstanding the magnitude of the disaster and the scarcity of our resources, we can state with satisfaction that very positive and resolute progress has been made in this area, with, of course, the generous and effective support of the international community. Those affected have been given shelter, pending settlement in permanent locations. The environment is a priority in all of the Government's programmes and projects, and our productive capacity is now operational, if not fully at least to a significant extent.

Of course, the range of outstanding issues is considerable, but the foundation has been rebuilt and, despite the obstacles, the rest of the structure is being erected with enthusiasm and determination.

My delegation subscribes to the universal principles which we hope will be adopted in the declaration which is currently being negotiated.

The Acting President *(spoke in Spanish)*: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abdallah Baali, Chairman of the delegation of Algeria.

Mr. Baali (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): We are here today in New York to undertake together a rigorous and clear-sighted assessment of what has been accomplished since Istanbul in the area of human settlements, and to reflect together on the measures that need to be taken in order to meet the challenges of sustainable development, protection of the environment, promotion of human rights and the eradication of poverty. In that way we can provide for all of the inhabitants of our planet a life in conditions of dignity and security, to which they have a legitimate right.

Since time immemorial, man has associated the ideal model of community organization — the city — with the design and construction of human settlements.

In Algeria, the size of a kasbah or village is carefully adapted to natural resources; irrigation systems are set up so as to maximize their judicious and cost-effective use; and roadways and construction are designed in a way that allows people to enjoy the outdoors and the sun while respecting their neighbours. This translates, in terms of human settlements, into an entire culture that is based on community life.

At the same time, a dual set of rules prevails. The first is a veritable urban code governing housing relations with one's neighbour, and the second governs the conditions for the use, maintenance and development of common areas by appealing to community solidarity, which we call *touiza*, *taoussa* or *tiwizi*.

In our modern world, these values are now sought after. Citizenship, shared responsibility, partnership and governance — are these concepts, so fashionable today, not the fundamental expression of the principle that human settlements are, above all, a community based on solidarity?

It seems to us even more timely and necessary to recall the principle of solidarity given that throughout the world living conditions in cities, the increasing number of homeless persons and of slums, the deterioration of the environment, rising poverty and the renewed spread of childhood diseases are showing no sign of improvement.

Furthermore, the high concentration of people forced by abject poverty to the periphery of cities and into high-risk areas is contributing to housing problems and leading to greater insecurity in the urban areas of the developing countries.

In this respect, the Istanbul Agenda offers useful and realistic perspectives and frameworks for cooperation. We must use those to our advantage.

Given the immensity of the challenges facing us, genuine international solidarity is required. It must be based on massive development assistance, debt cancellation or the reconversion of debt into housing assistance, the fight against poverty and the

preservation of the environment. It must support and consolidate the actions that have been taken at the national and regional levels.

Mass urbanization, with its links to poverty, in turn gives rise to a number of questions. These are made even more difficult by the fragility of governance and local financing, inadequate urban management and archaic and obsolete forms of management that require, as an integral part of a human-rights-based approach, decisive measures to achieve greater involvement on the part of local authorities and of agencies responsible for housing management.

The need for housing security is also contributing to the emergence of a fresh approach to housing policy, whose goal is to enhance access by the poor and, increasingly, by women not only to better housing but also to public services, thereby guaranteeing the right to reasonable employment, political representation at the local and national levels, and genuine gender equality.

Finally, local governance, which involves a transfer of power to the grass-roots level, also implies a recognition of the rights of the various segments of the population to participate directly and effectively in decisions that affect them.

For us, the increasing number of significant events taking place at the global level that focus on the areas of the environment, resources and cities constitute a fresh opportunity to recall our collective responsibility in these areas.

Today, the requirements of globalization and the legitimate quest to meet the needs of the majority in the areas of employment, housing, health care and education seem inexorably to propel us towards a development that is based on quantity and which is tearing apart our cities and harming our towns.

Our response to the principal challenges of the third millennium should be based on the enhancement of our creative capacities, with a view to moving towards universality without losing ourselves in it and to adapt our responses to newly emerging needs, while drawing inspiration from the best aspects of our culture and our traditions.

In this spirit, here in New York, we must work to translate into reality the two major objectives in the area of settlements: adequate housing for all and sustainable human settlements development in an increasingly urbanizing world that daily is becoming more and more of a global village.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to Mr. Rashid Alimov, Chairman of the delegation of Tajikistan.

Mr. Alimov (Tajikistan) (*spoke in Russian*): The twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly has a very important task before it: to objectively review and appraise the progress that has been made in the five years that have elapsed since the adoption of the Habitat Declaration on Human Settlements in Istanbul, in order to determine guidelines for future progress based on our experience at both the national and international levels.

It is particularly important now, in this era of globalization, when active efforts are under way to agree on parameters for the future development of this phenomenon which would provide for a genuine and just distribution of the benefits of the new economy among countries and all the segments of the population.

In our view, during the last five years, much has been achieved, but clearly a great deal remains to be accomplished.

Tajikistan is a firm supporter of the goals of the Habitat Agenda. Our Republic is making a tremendous effort to provide decent housing for all, to create conditions that will allow for the participation of society in the quest for solutions to key issues, and to achieve gender equality.

But my country faces considerable difficulties in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. These are a result of the civil conflict, which has left tens of thousands of people without housing, and of the transition to a market economy, exacerbated by economic decline and the lack of social protection. Further, we lack the wherewithal for investment, which is a very serious problem for us. Hence, outside assistance is absolutely vital for my country. We place high value on the outcome of the recent Tokyo conference of donors to Tajikistan, with support from the United Nations and the World Bank, on sustainable post-conflict peace-building in Tajikistan. We hope that the outcome of the Tokyo meeting will spur development in my country so that we can engage in a stable peace process.

The Government of Tajikistan intends to do its utmost to attain the goals of the Istanbul Conference. Our top priorities at present are to eradicate the aftermath of the conflict in urban areas and to engage in post-conflict economic reconstruction. Here, we believe it most important that among the results of this special session be a decision by the international community to increase its efforts to assist countries that have suffered from conflict in attaining sustainable development for their cities and other population centres. Peace and sustainable development in Tajikistan are in the interest not only of my country and the entire Central Asian region, but also of Europe and the entire international community. It is important to secure social justice for the entire population, especially for its most vulnerable sectors.

The goals of the Agenda include the attainment of gender equality in employment and education, along with the advancement of women and the protection of the family and of mothers and children. Despite its difficulties during this transitional period, Tajikistan is formulating a national mechanism to ensure equal opportunity and equal rights, especially in education and employment. My Government has developed programmes to combat poverty. Implementing them will enable us to resolve a number of the problems that have arisen in line with the Istanbul Declaration.

Another priority is to strengthen the health system in urban and rural areas: the health of our people is the most important precondition for the implementation of the goals of the Istanbul Conference. Sustainable development hinges on the ability of countries to ensure an adequate level of health. The health system suffers from insufficient financing and a lack of qualified staff. Deteriorating economic conditions lead to declining sanitation in populated areas and to epidemics, especially of water-borne diseases. We hope that this year's conference on fresh water in Tajikistan will enable the world community to focus on the issue of access by all to drinking water.

The provision of decent housing for all and the question of human settlements demand urgent measures to seek new sources of financing, especially from the private sector. We welcome the provisions in the Declaration relating to towns and human settlements in the new millennium.

I wish in conclusion to stress that we feel certain, regardless of our difficulties in attaining the Istanbul goals, that with motivation, well-conceived national policies, and solidarity and support from the international community, we will be able to put in place the conditions needed to reach them.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, Chairman of the delegation of Palestine.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to inform the Assembly that members of the Palestinian delegation who were to have traveled Palestine have been prevented from coming here to participate in the work of the special session, owing to the closure imposed by Israel, the occupying Power, on the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Needless to say, we condemn this most forcefully.

In our written statement, copies of which are available to participants, we discuss the importance of this special session and of implementing the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda. We go on to address the most important problems, especially those facing the developing countries, with special reference to Africa.

The Palestinians too suffer from the many problems that face other peoples, especially in developing countries. The most serious issue before us relates to the colonization of occupied Palestine, whose people face special problems requiring urgent solutions. For 34 years the Palestinian people has been chafing under the yoke of Israeli foreign occupation. The occupying authorities' oppressive policies and practices have an adverse effect on all aspects of life, including social and economic aspects, and jeopardize the very existence of the Palestinian people.

The gravest aspects of the colonization of the occupied Palestinian territories are the transfer of the occupying Power's civilian population to the occupied territories, the establishment of Israeli settlements and the ongoing confiscation of Palestinian land. The occupying Power continues to this day to build and expand settlements, transfer more settlers, build bypass roads and confiscate more Palestinian land and natural resources to fuel these activities, which are all illegal under international law.

The purpose of those settlement activities is to alter the legal status, geographical nature and demographic composition of the occupied Palestinian territories. Today there are more than 200 Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Despite the peace process, no Israeli Government has ceased its illegal activities in this sphere. The present and long-term consequences of these Israeli practices are gravely harmful to the living conditions of the Palestinian people, to their efforts to achieve sustainable development and to the prospects for peace in the region. The impact of Israel's illegal settlement activities has been particularly harsh in occupied East Jerusalem, where for decades the Israeli Government has been expropriating Palestinian land and building and expanding settlements at a feverish pace in total disregard of international law and relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. Besides altering the city's municipal boundaries, the practices of the occupying Power — which are aimed at the Judaization of the city — have changed the geographical nature and demographic composition of Jerusalem, and have affected its historical and cultural character.

Another human-settlements issue that has been on the Palestinian agenda for decades is the plight of Palestine refugees and displaced persons. Since 1948, Palestine refugees, now numbering some 3.8 million, representing the world's largest and longest-standing refugee population, have lived in what were intended to be temporary camps and shelters, awaiting their return to their homes and property. For more than 53 years, these refugees have lived in severely cramped and crowded dwellings, lacking such basic services as adequate sanitation systems and paved roads and surrounded by an underdeveloped and dilapidated infrastructure. In fact, the refugee camps of Gaza are among the most densely populated stretches of land in the world. Moreover, the rates of poverty and unemployment among the Palestinian refugee population are very severe and have continued to rise astronomically during the renewed turmoil afflicting the Palestinian people under occupation. In this regard, our statement necessarily touches on the practices of the occupying Power since 28 September 2000 and their catastrophic consequences.

We should like to take the opportunity of this special session to reaffirm the need for the international community to exert greater efforts to accelerate the process of resolving the ongoing and tragic plight of the Palestinian people. Work must be done to solve the many problems that continue to hinder the implementation of the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda, and in particular to eradicate poverty and discrimination, promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all and provide for such basic needs as education, nutrition, stable life expectancy, health care services and, especially, adequate shelter for all. The first, most important and urgent step in this regard must be to bring an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian people.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.